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ALSO:

TMNT

X-MEN

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DOCTOR WHO

THE CONJURING 2

AND MORE!

MOVIES ★ TV ★ GAMING ★ AUDIO ★ COMICS ★ BOOKS

**ISSUE
425**

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 425!

Yet again, and with great sadness, **STARBURST** says goodbye to yet another icon that graced the cover and pages of our formative years in publication. It's been a rough patch lately with Christopher Lee, Alan Rickman, Patrick Macnee, Bowie, Prince and others – It's felt like a huge watershed. Like our connection to this earlier era is being slowly severed. This time around we are saying goodbye to Gareth Thomas.

My childhood hero, and a man who helped me out of a very tight spot. It's tough to remember just how big **Blake's 7** was in the UK at the time we started publication, but from the cover of Issue 6 onwards it was a series that captured the zeitgeist of our readers. Gareth Thomas only appeared in cameos for the latter two of its four series run, and yet along with Kerr Avon, Roj Blake was a truly iconic TV character. Gareth Thomas played it straight. Blake was a rebel with a strong sense of nobility. It was a joy to watch Gareth Thomas and Paul Darrow in those roles, they raised a TV show with a miniscule budget way above its modest aspirations (plus The Liberator is way cooler than The Enterprise).

I met Gareth back in 1998 when I booked him to open the **Fab Café** Cult TV and Movie Theme Bar in Manchester. There was a lot at stake and pretty much my future was on the line at that point. When news that he had agreed to appear got out, we were inundated with requests for tickets and had to have three opening nights. Just what we needed.

The opening night itself has become the stuff of local legends, as many Mancunians often remember that day, and it often comes up in conversations. You see, Gareth liked cider, and had a larger than life personality. He also didn't suffer fools gladly and a few hours in had a stormy run in with the Daily Sport's reporters, who promptly did a hatchet job on him in the morning edition!

What the article didn't cover was just simply what a great bloke he was, and how he made time for everyone (even the fans that plagued him to read *their* script of what happened after the last episode). He was a right laugh and would stay up until the early hours regaling you with genuinely funny stories. If it sounds like the first opening night was a bit of a nightmare, well it was, but in the best way possible, and I wouldn't change a moment of it. He was a great actor, a genuine character, and you always knew he was in the room.

Thanks to Gareth (and his lively performance) **Fab Café** had an epic launch, the success of which funded the rescue of **STARBURST** when it ran into trouble during the worldwide financial crisis. Without him, it is very possible that you might not have this very magazine in your hands.

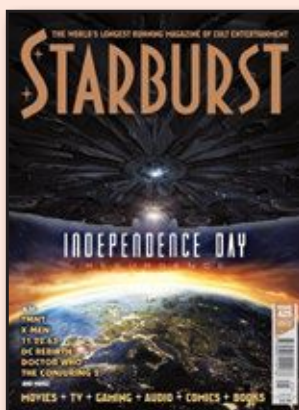
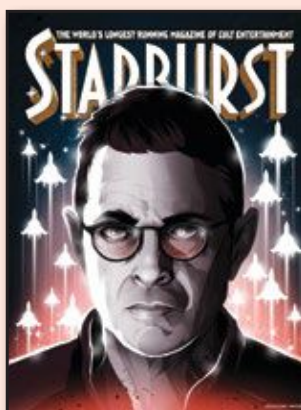
Cheers Gareth.

Until next time, keep watching the weird and wonderful,



Jordan Royce

Jordan Royce
EDITOR



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STAR

STARBURST INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

I have to say I was intrigued by the full page ad in issue 423 for the STARBURST INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, said intrigue turning to genuine excitement the following issue after reading It's Only A Movie (issue 424). A weekend of STARBURST related fun and frivolity with guests and movies and like minded people and booze and awards ceremonies and booze. The last time STARBURST did something like this (that I went to anyway) was way back in 1980 at the Marvel Film and Fantasy Convention with the likes of Ray Harryhausen, Caroline Munro, the Blakes 7 cast, Bill Sienkiewicz and loads of others in attendance. And yes, STARBURST stalwarts like John Brosnan and Tony Crawley where there too. It was a cracking weekend that's been long overdue a repeat performance. So god bless you Jordan for organising what sounds like an even bigger and better STARBURST shindig. Nothing could possibly stop me from attending this one (it's only a couple of hours up the motorway).

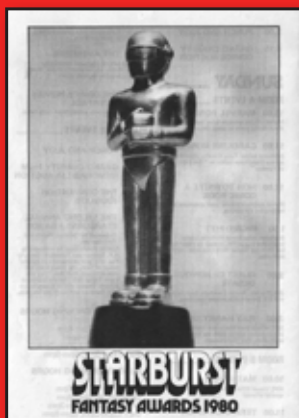
Then I looked at the date and... noooooooo!!!! It's on the August Bank Holiday weekend!!! The same time as Frightfest!!! I was going to say "how could

you?" but, obviously, it's the August Bank Holiday weekend so it's the perfect time for a three dayer. Seriously, all the best with this one.

Cheers,
Eddie Maddock/Haddock

P.S - I've attached the files for the 1980 convention programme. Always thought those Gort statues Caroline Munro and Paul Darrow gave out at the awards ceremony were rather nifty.

Doh! You got our hopes up that we were going to meet The Haddock, in all your scaly glory! Not trying to bribe you or anything but how about if instead of winning a 3-month sub, you win a free ticket!?!?



LETTER



"Is this what they mean by only having a skeleton staff."

Winner: YVONNE KEYES. Head over to www.starburstmagazine.com to enter this month's caption contest.

THE LAST X3 FAN STANDING

I loved your X-MEN coverage (STARBURST #424) but I have to take issue with the view that the 3rd X-MEN movie (THE LAST STAND) is a mess. If anything X-MEN: THE LAST STAND is actually a great movie with some brave moments and a great storyline raising some serious issues along the way. The scene (spoiler alert for those who haven't seen it!) with Xavier's physical death is heart breaking and Magneto's callous attitude towards Mystique is cruel but make fantastic moments. Unlike X-MEN: FIRST CLASS which is a boring movie in many ways!

With the exception of the opening scenes with Erik seeking vengeance FIRST CLASS is a dull affair with the whole pastiche of the '60s period and baffling timeline nonsense. The timeline in these movies is an absolute nightmare with no continuity at all with each scriptwriter attempting to make his own mark and jettison anything that has already stood.

Mazher Karim, via EMAIL

I think X3 fans are in the minority but there are a few of them kicking about. One person in the office is a fan! I think one thing that most people agree on though are that the trailers for X-MEN: APOCALYPSE look fantastic! We're all X-cited!

FRINGE BINGE

I would just like to say a big "thank you" for the three-issue subscription I won through your caption competition recently. I have just finished reading the last of them and thought the least I can do is to write you a little letter with a few random thoughts on things...

The X-FILES mini series. I was really looking forward to it,

but found that after watching it I was compelled to buy and promptly watch the entire series of FRINGE to get the bad taste out of my mouth. I prefer proper acting and decent storylines. Bring back Walter Bishop!

GAME OF THRONES.

Like most people, I love this programme and hope that Bran gets to possess one of the dragons in the future. Another thing, does anyone else (who is of a certain age) get reminded of Michael Bentine's Potty Time when they see the show's opening sequence? Especially The Wall part.

DAREDEVIL. I lived Paul Mount's nightmare and watched both series one after the other within three weeks (Just after I finished my FRINGE binge!). I don't feel that I missed out on anything to be completely honest and find myself looking forward to seeing if the Stilt Man legs in the background of the Gladiator's workshop come into the show at some point. I found the series very entertaining but feel that "The Man Without Fear" should be more realistically called "The Man Without Teeth Or Liver" due to the copious amounts of beatings and alcohol absorbed each episode!

PENNY DREADFUL. It's a real shame, but I don't know anyone else who is watching this brilliant programme. Rich and intriguing, provocative, romantic, tragic, ugly yet beautiful. It's superbly designed and has some world class acting. I hope this series can go on and on. All it needs is Walter Bishop!

Mark Fletcher, via EMAIL

You make some good points, there Mark - glad you've enjoyed the magazine and the great TV.

STARBURST

NEXT ISSUE: 426 ON SALE FROM JUNE 17TH

GARETH THOMAS

It's hard to imagine that there are too many actors, even today, who would wilfully walk away from their first proper leading television series role, citing creative frustration and dissatisfaction with scripts and storylines. That way, you might think, would lie madness and a protracted period of 'resting' until the heat dies down. The very fact that Welsh-born actor Gareth Thomas, who passed away last month from heart failure at the age of 71, handed in his teleport bracelet and hand-blaster at the end of the second season of BBC TV's 1970s space opera *Blake's 7* – in which he played heroic futuristic freedom fighter Roj Blake – says much for the actor's dedication to his craft and his refusal to compromise his professional integrity. For here was an actor who, unlike many who become closely and uncomfortably associated with one specific defining role, would continue an already well-established and respected career long after *Blake's 7* had passed into Cult TV history. And happily, again like many apparently stereotyped actors, he finally found his peace with the character of Roj Blake and, more recently, he returned to the fold and became a genre hero all over again thanks to a new run of Big Finish audio productions.

Born in Aberystwyth in 1945, Gareth Thomas was educated at King's College, Canterbury and enrolled at Oxford University to study English and History, leaving after a year to study acting at RADA (Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts) in London. He quickly became a popular face amongst the Royal Shakespeare Company (who he rejoined almost immediately after leaving *Blake's 7* in 1979) and by the end of the 1960s, he was making his first screen appearances, most notably as one of the London Tube workmen uncovering an extra-terrestrial artefact in the Underground in the Hammer classic *Quatermass and the Pit* in 1967. During the 1970s, he was appearing regularly on British television, enjoying a recurring role in ITV drama

Parkin's Patch as well as guest roles in popular series such as *Coronation Street*, *Z Cars*, *Man at the Top*, and *Public Eye*. In 1976, he appeared in eight episodes of the see-it-to-believe-it science-fiction series *Star Maidens*, an early international TV co-production, in which he played Shem, one of a pair of male escapees from the female-dominated planet Medusa. He also starred alongside Iain Cuthbertson in the unforgettable 1976 ITV children's fantasy drama *Children of the Stones* as astrophysicist Adam Brake. *Blake's 7*, BBC One's Terry Nation-created space adventure, arrived in 1977 and Gareth was cast as Roj Blake, a political dissident struggling against a thuggish totalitarian regime called The Federation which keeps Mankind passive and compliant. Framed for child abuse offences – extraordinarily daring for an early evening drama series on British TV in the 1970s – trouble-maker Blake is shipped off to a prison planet but teams up with a lively band of misfits to form a group of terrorist rebels striking back at the Federation from an abandoned super-powered alien spacecraft. *Blake's 7* was an immediate hit but Gareth became increasingly disillusioned by the show in its second series as it strayed from its original gritty remit into the more fantastical worlds of science fiction, complete with outlandish aliens and men in rubber monster costumes. "By halfway through the second series, I began to think that this was not actually what I wanted," he said in the 2006 BBC Four documentary *The Cult of Blake's 7*. His requests to direct episodes and become more closely involved with the development of the scripts were rejected so he summarily quit the series at the end of its second series, although Blake was to cast an almost-mythical shadow across the rest of its run. He returned briefly at the end of the third series and in the very last episode, broadcast in 1981, in which Blake (at the actor's request) was finally and irrevocably killed off along with the rest of the regular cast as the series drew to a close.


Gareth Thomas continued to work steadily through the 1970s and 1980s, earning his second BAFTA nomination for Wales-based drama *Morgan's Boy* (the work he was most proud of) in 1984, and he resumed his association with 'fantasy' TV in series such as *Knights of God* (alongside former *Doctor Who* Patrick Troughton and *Downton Abbey* mastermind Julian Fellowes), *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)*, *The Strangerers* and in 'Ghost Machine', one of the better episodes from the first series of *Doctor Who* spin-off *Torchwood* in 2006. He moved to Scotland towards the end of the 1980s and his TV career began to decline, but he continued to perform on stage in productions as diverse as *Desire Under the Elms* in 2010 and an acclaimed run as Brother Cadfael in a production of *Virgin in the Ice* in 2013. Further sporadic TV appearances included *Maigret*, *Medics*, *Casualty* and regular roles in popular series such as *London's Burning* and *Heartbeat*.

In 2012, he returned to fight the good fight as Roj Blake in a number of full-cast audios for Big Finish, with whom he had already established a typically warm and creative relationship. "I loved working with Gareth," Big Finish's Executive Producer Nick Briggs told STARBURST. "He starred in my series *Dalek Empire*, playing an ancient warrior called Kalendorf. He fully embraced the character, took it really seriously and actually changed the way I wrote it. His enthusiasm for the role was very tangible indeed. He used the character breakdown I'd written as his 'bible' for the part and said to me, 'Well, if you're saying he's this kind of character, should he do this, this and this?' He was dead right! I learnt a lot from him. A consummate professional and a really lovely chap."

Gareth Thomas is survived by his third wife Linda, and his son Gwyn.

PAUL MOUNT

1945 - 2016



*"THE CHOICE IS VERY
SIMPLE; YOU CAN EITHER
FIGHT OR YOU CAN DIE!"*

Roj Bake, Blake's 7, 1978

THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE
BEST (AND WORST)
OF THIS MONTH'S
MOVIE / TV NEWS



Nicolas Winding Refn's latest looks like being an ethereal blend of glamour and violence. The writer/director of the superb **Bronson** and **Drive** appears to have created a beautiful world of vampire-esque supermodels, and it promises to have a suitably idiosyncratic score from Cliff Martinez, which will play an even larger part in the movie, much to the delight of the composer. The film has been described as being in the melodramatic style of **Valley of the Dolls** in the first half, and **The Texas Chain Saw Massacre** in the second. We can't wait. **The Neon Demon** hits UK screens on July 8th.

MARVEL

With **Captain America: Civil War** now in our rear view, it's all eyes forward where the Marvel Cinematic Universe is concerned. As such, it's no surprise that there's a whole load of Marvel news this month.

First up, having debuted in **Civil War**, Tom Holland's Spider-Man has seen his first solo movie given an official title. To be known as **Spider-Man: Homecoming**, the Marvel Studios and Sony Pictures production will pick things up nicely with ol' Webhead, himself one of the very finest parts of the stunning **Civil War**, as he truly steps up to become a bona fide hero. But not content with just a title, the film

has also brought in some new cast members over the past month; **One Life to Live**'s Laura Harrier and **The Grand Budapest Hotel**'s Tony Revolori have landed the roles of some of Peter Parker's fellow high school students, with Harrier's role in particular described as 'significant'. In addition to this, Michael Keaton was at one point in talks to play the movie's villain, believed to be Adrian Toomes/The Vulture, before negotiations sadly broke down. As well as Holland, Harrier and Revolori on board, the film will also feature Marisa Tomei as Aunt May and Zendaya as a female lead known as Michelle. Additionally, Robert Downey Jr.'s Tony Stark is expected to turn up in the Wallcrawler's first MCU solo feature. To be directed by **Cop Car**'s Jon Watts, **Spider-Man: Homecoming** is currently set for a July 7th, 2017 release.

And on the topic of Iron Man, Downey Jr. has gone on record to say he feels like he "could do one more" when it comes to the idea of another solo movie for Shellhead. You'd have to think that as soon as those words were muttered, the higher-ups at Marvel Studios and Disney immediately sprang into action to try and put an **Iron Man 4** together.

Following the release of **Spider-Man: Homecoming**, the next MCU offering will be November 2017's **Thor: Ragnarok**. The next outing for the Son of Odin has now brought in **Creed**'s Tessa Thompson as a new love interest for Chris Hemsworth's Thor. But wait, isn't the Thunder God totally, totally smitten with Natalie Portman's Jane Foster? Well, yes he is, but it's been confirmed that Portman won't be returning for **Ragnarok**. With **What We Do in the Shadows**' Taika Waititi on board to direct, **Thor: Ragnarok** will arrive on November 3rd, 2017.

Interestingly, Hemsworth's Odinson, along with Chris Pratt's Peter Quill, have this month been confirmed to be a part of the Russo Brothers' two-part **Avengers: Infinity War**. Those movies, though, are due to undergo a name change by the time they hit the big screen, with Joe Russo revealing that the **Infinity War** subtitle will be dropped for both of their **Avengers** efforts. Could it be that the films will pull inspiration from comic book events/arcs such as **Infinity Gauntlet**, **Infinity Abyss**, or **Infinity Crusade** when it comes to titles? It could well be. At present, the still-titled **Avengers: Infinity War Part I** is set for May 4th, 2018 and **Avengers: Infinity War Part II** will follow on May 3rd, 2019.

Following heavy speculation, Marvel Studios and Disney have removed **Inhumans** from their distribution slate entirely. The initial plan was for the film to be released on July 12th, 2019 as part of Marvel's Phase Four, although that's now not the case. Seemingly, part of the reason for the issues surrounding **Inhumans** is due to the unplanned additions to the MCU slate of **Spider-Man: Homecoming** and **Ant-Man and The Wasp**. Elsewhere for Marvel Studios, Kevin Feige has said that they are 'committing' to a solo movie for Scarlett Johansson's Black Widow, whilst Sharon Stone has let slip that she's landed a small role in one of the upcoming MCU efforts.

Switching our focus to 20th Century Fox's Marvel properties, James Mangold's **Wolverine 3** has been busy expanding its cast over the past month. Joining Hugh Jackman for his final outing as Logan are new additions in the form of Boyd Holbrook, Richard E. Grant, Stephen Merchant, Eriq La Salle and Elise Neal. The roles landed by these names are all being kept schtum at this stage, although we know that **Narcos**' Holbrook is to be the 'big bad' of the piece and the iconic Grant is supposedly playing some sort of crazed scientist. In addition to all of this, there's also word that the X-23 character – essentially a female clone of Wolverine – will be a part of Mangold's follow-up to **The Wolverine** when it hits cinemas on March 3rd, 2017.

Whilst Hugh Jackman's time as Wolvie is coming to an end,



We've now gotten our first look at the suited-up titular team from the upcoming **Power Rangers** reboot. Production designer Andrew Menzies said of the new look, "Ours is an alien costume that grows on them, that's not man-made. You can't win everyone over, but we are trying to appeal to a more mature audience and gain new fans." Alien costumes? Well that's certainly going to split opinion... As for the team, they're made up of Becky G as Trini/Yellow Ranger, Ludi Lin as Zack/Black Ranger, Dace Montgomery as Jason/Red Ranger, Naomi Scott as Kimberly/Pink Ranger, and RJ Cyler as Billy/Blue Ranger.

The official synopsis of **Power Rangers** reads: *Saban's Power Rangers follows five ordinary high school kids who must become something extraordinary when they learn that their small town of Angel Grove – and the world – is on the verge of being obliterated by an alien threat. Chosen by destiny, our heroes quickly discover that they are the only ones who can save the planet. But to do so they will have to overcome their real-life issues and band together as the Power Rangers before it is too late.*

To be directed by **Project Almanac**'s Dean Israelite, **Power Rangers** is currently set for a March 24th, 2017 release. AP

elsewhere in the X-Men realm, the New Mutants team are getting ready to make their big screen bow. Director Josh Boone has been long confirmed to helm **New Mutants**, although we're yet to find out just which young mutants will be a part of the movie's titular team. During this past month, though, Boone took to his Instagram page to seemingly reveal that the team will be made up of Magik, the teleporting sister of Colossus; the werewolf-like Wolfsbane; the psionic-powered Dani Moonstar; energy-propelling Cannonball; solar-powered Sunspot; and the techno-organic size-shifting Warlock. Judging from the pictures shown, it could also be that we see an appearance from Lockheed, Kitty Pryde's famed dragon companion. It had previously been reported that **Game of Thrones**' Maisie Williams was up for the role of Wolfsbane and **The Witch's** Anya Taylor-Joy was in the frame to play Magik, not to mention speculation that Alexandra Shipp's Storm and James McAvoy's Professor X will be a part of **New Mutants**. The film has yet to be given a release date.

And in some final Marvel movie news, director Tim Miller has been confirmed to return for **Deadpool 2**, joining star Ryan Reynolds and writers Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick in returning for the sequel to this year's hugely popular **Deadpool**. The follow-up was a no-brainer from the moment **Deadpool** hit the big screen, with the Merc with a Mouth's outing becoming the highest grossing R-rated movie of all time, the highest grossing X-Men movie, and currently sitting as the highest grossing film of 2016.

Taking things down to the small screen, it came as no surprise this past month when it was confirmed that Jon Bernthal's Frank Castle will be getting his own Netflix-exclusive series. Bernthal's take on The Punisher impressed many during his appearances on the second season of **Marvel's Daredevil** when that arrived on the on-demand service earlier this year. Steve Lightfoot, writer and executive producer of **Hannibal**, has been announced as the showrunner for this

new show, which likely won't arrive before early 2018.

Whilst we've seen Bernthal's Castle already, we've yet to see Finn Jones' Danny Rand, aka Iron Fist. With **Marvel's Iron Fist** now shooting ahead of a 2017 Netflix release, the series has brought in **Lord of the Rings**' David Wenham as Harold Meachum, the character responsible for the death of Rand's parents in the comic book realm.

The Following's Jessica Stroup and **Banshee**'s Tom Pelphrey are to play Meachum's kids, Joy and Ward, respectively. Helping to fight the good fight alongside Danny Rand will be Jones' fellow **Game of Thrones** alumna Jessica Henwick, who'll be playing badass samurai Colleen Wing. Scott Buck is the showrunner for **Marvel's Iron Fist**.

Of course, Netflix's Marvel heroes, who *do* exist in the great Marvel Cinematic Universe, are to come together in **The Defenders**, a mini-series that will start production towards the end of the year. And now we know who'll be overseeing that team-up series. It's been announced that Douglas Petrie and Marco Ramirez will serve as showrunners on **Marvel's The Defenders**; the pair have previously worked on **Marvel's Daredevil**. They'll be joined by Oscar-nominated Drew Goddard as executive producer. **Marvel's The Defenders** will see Charlie Cox's Daredevil, Krysten Ritter's Jessica Jones, Mike Colter's Luke Cage, and Finn Jones' Iron Fist teaming up.

To wrap up all things Marvel, there's been yet another Marvel-based show put into development as the Freeform network has placed a series order for a show based on Cloak and Dagger. At this early stage, the show is being described as a 'superhero love story' which will focus on Tandy Bowen and Tyrone Johnson as they learn to use their superpowers whilst they fall head-over-heels for one another. In terms of powers, Cloak is able to teleport himself and others, whilst Dagger has the ability to create life-sapping light daggers with her thoughts. The duo first appeared back in 1982's **Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-Man** #64, created by Bill Mantlo and Ed Hannigan. AP



A STAR WARS STORY

Alden Ehrenreich has all but been confirmed as Disney's new Han Solo. Multiple outlets are reporting that the **Hail, Caesar!** actor has definitely, definitely, definitely signed on to headline Phil Lord and Chris Miller's Han Solo-focused **Star Wars Story** movie. That said, there's still no official word from either Disney or Lucasfilm. It's believed that Ehrenreich, who is also known for his work in the likes of **Stoker**, **Blue Jasmine**, **Twixt**, and **Tetro**, has now finally signed on to play the younger Han, beating out competition from the likes of Taron Egerton, Jack Reynor, Miles Teller, and Dave Franco.

This **Star Wars Story** movie will basically tell us the tale of how Han Solo came to be the loveable scoundrel that we first met in Mos Eisley in 1977. And yes, Chewbacca will also be a part of the film.

At present, this still untitled Solo film is set for a May 25th, 2018 release. Before that, Gareth Edwards' **Rogue One: A Star Wars Story** will arrive this December before Rian Johnson's **Star Wars: Episode VIII** hits cinemas in December 2017. AP

JEKYLL

Lionsgate has optioned 2007 BBC series **Jekyll** for a big-screen movie remake.

The modern-day version of **The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde** was written by Steven Moffat back when he was best known for scripting some of **Doctor Who**'s most celebrated episodes instead of becoming one of its most divisive showrunners, co-creating **Sherlock** and gifting Benedict Cumberbatch to a grateful world.

Starring James Nesbitt in the dual title role, it ran for one six-episode series and aside from a gaping plot hole opened by one of its core revelations and Paterson Joseph's wobbly American accent, it was great fun. It also incorporated the novel ideas of Robert Louis Stevenson's book existing within its world, and despite being a drama tinted with horror it was largely cast with talented actors primarily known for comedy.

Quite how Lionsgate plan to condense a six-hour narrative into the length of a single film remains to be seen, and ready to take on the challenge are writing duo Anthony Bagarozzi and Chuck Mondry, who wrote a previous version of the script for the US adaptation of manga **Death Note** and are currently collaborating with Shane Black on the long-gestating **Doc Savage** movie. AP

STAR TREK

As things hot up with anticipation for **Star Trek: Beyond**, it's been confirmed that the new TV series (still untitled, but equally eagerly awaited) will begin filming in 'the fall' in Toronto under the watchful eye of showrunner Bryan Fuller (**Hannibal**). The show will premiere in January 2017 on CBS Television Network, then successive episodes will stream exclusively as a weekly series on the new on demand service CBS All Access, before making the move to more traditional TV stations and platforms. Unconfirmed reports suggest the series will take place after the original cast movies, and before **The Next Generation**, and will be the anthology format successfully

used by **American Horror Story** and **True Detective**.

Trekies will have a whole section of STARBURST to look forward to from next month, as we launch **The Saucer Section**, plus see below for the fantastic news of the upcoming Trek conventions in London later this year.

Star Trek: The Original Series and **Deep Space Nine** are both currently screening on CBS Action in the UK. You can find the channel on Sky 148, Virgin 192, Freeview 64, and Freesat 137.

EVENT HORIZON

As conventions go, they don't get bigger or better than a pair taking place later this year.

Showmaster's massive geekfest **London Film and Comic Con** returns for the summer show with a fabulous array of talent, many making rare signing appearances. Where else would you get to meet Mads Mikkelsen (**Hannibal**), Ron Perlman (**Hellboy**), Rutger Hauer (**Blade Runner**) and Dolph Lundgren (**The Expendables**)? We know STARBURST Shauna is chomping at the bit to get to the latter! There are also many more stars from the worlds of **Star Wars**, **Doctor Who**, **Gotham**, **Game of Thrones** and more. Book tickets and get details at londonfilmandcomiccon.com.

Destination Star Trek Europe will be beaming into Birmingham NEC for the weekend of October 7th/8th and is certainly not to be missed, as the line-up of guests is truly amazing. Headlining is Captain Kirk himself, William Shatner, with appearances from fellow **Original Series** stars George Takei and Walter Koenig. Also gracing the stage and signing areas are Christopher Lloyd, Wil Wheaton, Jonathan Frakes, Terry Farrell, Marina Sirtis, Alexander Siddig, Armin Shimerman and many more. Tickets and details are available from destinationstartrek.com.

DC

Despite **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice** firmly splitting opinion amongst fans and critics alike, one of the undisputed successes of the film was Ben Affleck's Caped Crusader. And now, after months of speculation, it's finally been confirmed that, yes, Affleck will indeed be directing a solo Batman movie for Warner Brothers. We've known for a while that the WB's latest Dark Knight was penning a Bats screenplay alongside DC's Geoff Johns, but now Warner Bros CEO Kevin Tsujihara has revealed that, as rumoured, Affleck will be pulling triple duty on what is believed to be titled **The Batman**. To date, Affleck has won plenty of plaudits for his directing work, with him having hit a homerun with everything he's helmed, from the stunning **Gone Baby Gone**, to the frantic **The Town**, to the Oscar-winning **Argo**. No release date has been announced at this stage for the World's Greatest Detective's solo movie, but there's a chance that the film could nab an October 2018 release. First and foremost, though, Affleck's Batman will be making a small appearance in David Ayer's **Suicide Squad** when that hits UK cinemas on August 5th.

Continuing the Bat-heavy theme, Jeremy Irons has confirmed that his Alfred Pennyworth will be a part of Zack Snyder's **Justice League: Part One**, joining J.K. Simmons' Jim Gordon in being someone for Affleck's Batman to lean on. Simmons, however, is no longer the only **Spider-Man** alumnus to be a part of **Justice League**, with Willem Dafoe, who famously played Norman Osborn/Green Goblin in Sam Raimi's Spidey trilogy, having joined the film in a mystery role described only as a 'good guy'. And in an interesting move, Ben Affleck will now serve as an executive producer on the two-part **Justice League** as Warner Bros look to bring in some other hands to help out Snyder. This is fresh off reports that the studio is looking to reassess their actual output following the creative licence given to Snyder on **Batman v Superman** and the subsequent response to that film. With recent big money flops such as **Jupiter Ascending**, **Pan**, and **In the Heart of the Sea**, Warner Bros were hit directly in their pride when **Batman v Superman** failed to hit the \$1 billion mark that they were hoping for. The fact that *three* MCU movies have surpassed \$1 billion to date (**Iron Man 3** and the two **Avengers** efforts) had the WB expecting **BvS** to reach that magic figure and beyond, but so far, the film has clocked in at just under \$900 million. That sounds like a decent amount, but the fact **Jurassic World** took \$1.67 billion led one WB source to bluntly

point out, "**You can't tell me Batman v Superman is so much less valuable**" when comparing two of pop culture's most iconic figures to Colin Trevorrow's *Jurassic World*. As much as we love us some dinosaurs, you'd have to say this is a completely valid point, particularly when Warner Bros spent close to \$300 million on *Batman v Superman*. It's believed that the studio is going to start to move away from some of their more home-grown efforts, instead looking to focus on projects that mirror what's being successfully done at Disney, i.e. the House of Mouse's Marvel, Pixar, and Lucasfilm movies. To do this, the WB are focusing their attention on their DC Comics, LEGO, and Harry Potter franchises, with Potter already having a new franchise spun off it. Warner Bros will still look to keep it in the family with some of their movies, for example letting the likes of Christopher Nolan, Clint Eastwood and Ben Affleck, all of whom have brought success to the studio, direct certain original films, but large parts of their focus are now on 'named' properties that have been established outside of the confines of the Warner Brothers lot. Either way, Zack Snyder's *Justice League: Part One*, which is currently shooting in London, is set for a November 2017 release, with *Part Two* to follow in June 2019. As for the Big Blue Boy Scout, though, Henry Cavill and Zack Snyder have both recently talked up how they would love to do another solo Superman movie,

despite the Man of Steel having no confirmed solo outings lined up on Warner Brothers' DC slate.

Adding further to the WB/DC troubles, this past month has seen *The Flash* lose its director. Seth Grahame-Smith, best known for penning *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, has departed the film due to the ever-familiar 'creative differences'. To star Ezra Miller, whose Scarlet Speedster debuted in this year's *Batman v Superman*, one of the biggest problems for *The Flash* is how to do something different to The CW's hugely popular Grant Gustin-headlined show. It had previously been said that the DCCU Flash movie was to stay true to Barry Allen whilst also telling a different story to The CW's *The Flash*. The problem there, though, is that the TV series has been knocking it out of the park, essentially telling the definitive story of Barry. So then you have the issue of trying to do something fresh and different to something that is the perfect way to handle the Flash. Where the DCCU is concerned, *The Flash* has a screenplay in place from *The LEGO Movie*'s Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, but now the film needs to find itself a new director. At present, *The Flash* is set for a March 16th, 2018 release, but before that we'll see Ezra Miller's Sultan of Speed as part of Zack Snyder's *Justice League: Part One*. In some other cinematic DC realm news, the Patty Jenkins-helmed *Wonder Woman*, starring Gal Gadot, has been moved forward from its June 23rd, 2017 release to a June 2nd, 2017 date.

As for the DC presence on TV, again it's a mixed bag. First up, *Krypton*, a concept that first reared its head eighteen months ago, is apparently close to getting a pilot order from Syfy. The idea for the show is to have it set on, you guessed it, Krypton 200 years ago, essentially focusing on Superman's grandfather as the main character of the show. On the other side of the coin, however, it appears as though CBS' *Supergirl* is in trouble. After an up and down first year, it's believed that the network is on the fence when it comes to renewing the Melissa Benoist-starrer. Rumoured to cost nearly \$3 million per episode in licensing fees for CBS, *Supergirl* has seen its viewing figures drop by nearly half over in the US after an impressive premiere which garnered 13 million viewers. There's actually talk that if CBS decline renewing *Supergirl*, Warner Brothers, who own the rights to the show, may move the series to The CW, which is the same network that houses *Arrow*, *The Flash* and DC's *Legends of Tomorrow*. After Grant Gustin's Barry Allen made a fantastic appearance in a recent *Supergirl* episode, such a move could be a great one to make if needed.

Forget the ups, downs, and potential moves, though, for there's one DC offering that has us all licking our lips in anticipation. With us eagerly awaiting *Batman: The Killing Joke*, which will be R-rated, a release date has finally been confirmed for the Sam Liu-directed effort. The animated outing, which is based on one of the very finest Batman stories, one which is often labelled as the definitive Joker tale, will be released on Blu-ray and DVD in the US on August 23rd. Before that, the movie will be released on Digital HD on July 23rd. A UK home release has yet to be confirmed, but we'll bring you that info when it's made available. With Kevin Conroy once again in the Batsuit, and Mark Hamill returning as The Joker, anticipation is high as fans look forward to seeing this animated adaptation of one of DC's most famous stories, 1988's *The Killing Joke*. ^{AP}

AND FINALLY...

As the remake machine trundles endlessly through the '80s, it was only a matter of time that it reached *Puppet Master*, David Schmoeller's 1989 cult favourite. *Bone Tomahawk*'s S. Craig Zahler will be handling the script, under the title *Puppet Master: The Little Reich*. Original producer Charles Band is on board in an executive production capacity (so essentially, he's just signed off on the idea, and taken the money).

+++

Although it didn't set cinema cash registers on fire, *Goosebumps* has done well enough for Sony to greenlight a sequel. Rob Letterman and Darren Lemke are reportedly signed up to direct/write respectively, once more. Jack Black is also expected to return, because - well, without him, it'd be nothing really.

horrorchannel

A round-up of what not to miss this month on Horror Channel...

MAY 20TH - TERROR (1978)

More satanic goings on in '70s England, with this idiosyncratic film visually influenced by Dario Argento's *Suspria*. The wonderful Norman J. Warren directs from a script by David McGillivray and it's a gloriously lurid - if baffling - treat.

+++

MAY 31ST - BLOOD OF DRACULA (1957)

A great little curio from the fifties set in a girls' boarding school. Had it been made twenty years later, it would have been a lot more salacious but as it is, there's still a lot of undercurrents at work as a female teacher hypnotises a young disturbed student during a rather unethical experiment. If you want horror, check out star Sandra Harrison's mutant eyebrows!

+++

JUNE 3RD - AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN PARIS (1997)

The sequel no one wanted to be one of the greatest horror films ever made. It has to be a disaster, right? Well, yeah... but there's still some retro fun to be had with the rudimentary CGI. Julie Delpy plays the love child of the original movie's tragic couple, cursed as her father was to roam the world as a lycanthrope - or Gay Paree, at least. *Z Nation*'s Tom Everett Scott is the poor Yank who is drawn into the drama.

+++

JUNE 7TH - ATOMIC DOG (2009)

Suitable for its late afternoon timeslot, this hokey sci-fi/horror about a pup that survives a radiation accident to become the titular hound. A search for the dog's missing litter and several growling attacks are on the agenda, but it's more fun than terrifying. Directed by the prolific if useless Brian Trenchard-Smith.

+++

There are more classic TV shows to watch out for too, with the debut of monster-hunting comedy action series *Special Unit 2* and another chance to catch the adaptation of Stephen King's *The Langoliers*, starring Dean Stockwell and David Morse. Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno return as *The Incredible Hulk* and there are terrifying alien abductions occurring in Dan Curtis' miniseries *Intruders*.

Horror Channel is available on SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138 and TalkTalk 487.

INDEPENDENCE DAY RESURGENCE PREVIEW

TWENTY YEARS LATER

BY KIERON MOORE

IN 1996, HUMANITY FOUGHT OFF AN ALIEN INVASION FORCE. IN 2016, THEY'RE COMING BACK — WITH BIGGER EXPLOSIONS THAN EVER! STARBURST LOOKS FORWARD TO BLOCKBUSTER SEQUEL

INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE...

Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* is the ultimate in the big, cheesy, fun school of blockbuster filmmaking. No one's ever going to claim a movie in which a dog jumps away from an explosion in slow motion is the epitome of human artistic achievement, but there's something charming about the film that makes it perfect for a lazy Friday evening. Released on July 2nd, 1996 — just in time for the American holiday which gave it its title — *Independence Day* was a massive success, becoming the second highest grossing movie in history (at the time) and launching the careers of Emmerich and his producer/co-writer Dean Devlin. Let's not forget, too, that the Oscar-winning visual effects were groundbreaking in their day — they didn't *really* blow up the White House, you know.

Originally produced as a one-off, the idea of a sequel started floating around Devlin's head after being inspired by the world's reaction to the 9/11 attacks; seeing people and countries unite against the threat of terror made him wonder whether the human race would do the same in the wake of an alien offensive. Attempts were made to work out a script with Emmerich, but ultimately fizzled out. Around about 2013, rumours sparked up again, with us briefly being promised two new films entitled *ID Forever Part I* and, you guessed it, *ID Forever Part II*. In 2014, however, it was a single sequel that got the greenlight, with Carter Blanchard rewriting Devlin and Emmerich's screenplay. Shot over the 2015 summer, *Independence Day: Resurgence* is finally about to hit cinema screens.

So what can we expect from this return to an Earth living in the wake of invasion? Here's a plot summary: the aliens come back and blow shit up. It's a Roland Emmerich film, you don't need any more than that, do you?

OK, let's go into a bit more detail. In the twenty years since the aliens came, the people of Earth have prepared themselves for any future attacks. The United Nations has created the Earth Space Defense, an agency specialising in defending the planet should such a sequel occur. Based in Beijing, the ESD has developed new fighter



"He's not the President, but they still call me President. I'm living in Virginia outside of D.C., living a quiet life. My daughter's got exciting things going on now; she used to live in the White House with me but now she's working for President Lanford."

Bill Pullman on where Thomas Whitmore is in this film.



"She's taken over where [Whitmore] left off, and it's become a multi-national effort by all of the world's leaders to protect the Earth. The Earth Space Defense program we've collectively worked on to stop an attack. It's taken 20 years, and here we are faced with just that. Are we ready? How well does it work?"

Sela Ward on playing President Lanford.



"We always knew they were coming back. After Independence Day redefined the event movie genre, the next epic chapter delivers global spectacle on an unimaginable scale. Using recovered alien technology, the nations of Earth have collaborated on an immense defense program to protect the planet. But nothing can prepare us for the aliens' advanced and unprecedented force. Only the ingenuity of a few brave men and women can bring our world back from the brink of extinction."

Jeff Goldblum on how the world is prepared for the threat of aliens.



jets using salvaged alien tech, set up an early warning system, and built a military base on the moon. They even have an alien prison under Area 51 (allegedly...). But all that might not be enough – back in 1996, before they could be defeated, the aliens sent a distress signal, and now a larger fleet is on its way. What's more, some of the original invaders survived and are now scattered across the globe, ready to strike. Basically, the human race is set for a conflict that, as Jeff Goldblum's David Levinson meta-referentially says, is 'definitely bigger than the last one'.

Yes, *ID:R* has avoided one of the major errors which *Jurassic World* made – it's got Jeff Goldblum back! Levinson, the 1996 film's satellite technician-turned-war hero, is now in charge of the ESD, and so will play a big part in this bigger, more testing struggle. Also returning is Bill Pullman's Thomas J. Whitmore, the United States President who famously got back in the cockpit of a fighter plane and joined the strike force against the alien forces. He's no longer President, though; having served a successful second term in which he helped develop worldwide unity against the potential threat of an alien return, Whitmore handed over to his successor in 2001. He's now retired and living a peaceful life in the Virginia suburbs, though that peace won't last – we've already seen Whitmore being strangled by a captive alien. The current President of the United States, however, is Sela Ward's Elizabeth



1996. WITNESSES DESCRIBED SEEING THE AIRCRAFT SPIN...HILLER WAS A HERO II



Lanford. A forward-thinking former Vice President who began her presidential term in 2013, Lanford is also this USA's first female President, and will be put to the ultimate test in leading her country's resistance against this new attack. Ward, star of *The Day After Tomorrow* and *CSI:NY*, has revealed that Lanford's presidency differs from Whitmore's in that she's overseeing a changed America with a 'very different climate' in which people are weary of living in fear, with the 1996 attack being this world's 9/11, and in which the country, and indeed the world, is less likely to be caught by surprise.





One character who isn't returning is Will Smith's Steven Hiller, the hotshot fighter pilot who took down an alien mothership. Smith isn't reprising his role because the actor is, according to Emmerich, 'too expensive' – a statement which seems odd coming from a film with an otherwise star-studded cast and in which enormous spaceships destroy entire cities. Hiller's absence has an in-story explanation – he died in an accident while testing those new fighter jets. Bummer. But the Hiller family will still be represented on screen, as Jessie Usher, most famous for kids' fantasy series *Level Up*, plays Dylan Dubrow-Hiller, Steven's stepson, who was played as a child by Ross Bagley in the original. Dylan's following in his dad's footsteps and is now a pilot in the ESD himself. Vivica A. Fox also reprises her role as Dylan's mother Jasmine, now working as a hospital administrator.

A highlight of the original film was the fighter jet action, and it looks like we'll be getting much more of that, as two new characters join with Dylan to form a *Top Gun*-esque crack pilot squad. Jake Morrison, played by *The Hunger Games* star Liam Hemsworth, is one of the ESD's best flyers; Morrison's parents were killed in the 1996 attacks, so he has a grudge to bear. He'll be flying alongside Patricia Whitmore, who is Thomas Whitmore's daughter and Morrison's love interest – the first big-budget movie role for Maika Monroe, star of excellent indie horror *It Follows*. Rounding off the ESD's team of



pilots is Chinese model/musician/actress Angelababy as Rain.

Resurgence will also see Judd Hirsch and Brent Spiner reprise their roles as, respectively, David's father Julius Levinson and Area 51 scientist Dr. Brackish Okun; though the unkempt Okun was seemingly tentacle-strangled to death back in the first movie, it turns out he was only in a coma. Further new characters include Charlotte Gainsbourg (*Melancholia*, *Nymphomaniac*) as Dr. Catherine Marceaux, William Fichtner (*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Prison*



"Who do you think is the director of Earth Space Defense? I don't want to toot my own horn, but yes, they made me the director. How about that? That's a big career jump. I was working for that cable company and riding a bicycle. But, of course, it sort of makes sense too. Because I was an environmentalist, wasn't I, which came from a deeply organic place. And I care deeply...about the planet, and the lifeforms on it, including all the animals too. And I don't like anybody coming and messing with it."

Jeff Goldblum on what David Levinson is doing these days.



"His parents were killed in the first attack. So he grew up in an orphanage, joined the military, and ended up as the best of the best fighter pilots; he makes a bad decision and ends up being demoted to the moon where he drives what is essentially the same as a forklift."

Liam Hemsworth on his character, Jake.

"I have a lot of stuff to do with Jeff Goldblum's character in this. We've had a lot of fun in the Moon Tugg... It's big, it weighs 40 tons. We had a lot of fun in that. It's kind of a different process than anything I've ever done before because it's a lot of imagining what's happening, filling in the blanks."

...and on working with Jeff Goldblum.



"In the very beginning, I wanted to work with him and he was excited to be in it but then after a while he was tired of sequels, and he did another science fiction film, which was his father-son story, so he opted out."

Roland Emmerich on how working on **After Earth** soured Will Smith on returning.

Break) as General Adams, Patrick St. Esprit (*The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, *Super 8*) as U.S. Secretary of Defense Tanner, and sixteen-year-old Joey King (*Fargo* Season One) as Sam. Will Smith's agent be damned – with returning stars such as Goldblum and Pullman alongside new talent such as Monroe and Usher, *Resurgence* has itself a very impressive ensemble – so impressive, in fact, that it's already won the CinemaCon 'Ensemble of the Universe' award before the film's even been seen. Then again, *Fantastic Four* won that last year...

But *Independence Day* was never about the acting, really – it's a Roland Emmerich movie; the punters want to see big stuff blow up. If the original *Independence Day* was the apotheosis of twentieth century blockbuster filmmaking, then *Resurgence* represents twenty-first century crowd-pleasers – in which CGI-enhanced chaos on a global scale is commonplace – cranked up to eleven. Tired of that quickly-becoming-old movie finale in which an entire city is destroyed? The trailers released so far have shown the Dubai skyline, including the Burj Khalifa, falling from the sky – into London! Two-in-one! It looks like Singapore's in for some trouble, too, as we've seen that city-state being pulled into the sky, bridges and skyscrapers crumbling as they go. Will anywhere be safe from this film's budget? If that doesn't represent the Roland Emmerich approach to filmmaking, updated for the CGI-laden cinema landscape of 2016, then what does?

As well as the aforementioned London, Dubai, and Singapore, the story will take in locations across America, a remote area of the African Congo in which alien survivors persist, and even the moon. The first movie told us that 'City Destroyers' like the one that blew up the White House had also attacked Berlin, London and Moscow, and that Sydney and Cairo barely escaped, but we only saw glimpses of the struggle going on outside of the United States. With Hollywood now selling to an increasingly international market, however, *Resurgence* will be a truly global blockbuster.

So, it's a movie built on the very twenty-first century Hollywood principle that bigger is better – every summer blockbuster these days has to one-up the last and show us more destruction; *Independence Day: Resurgence* looks like it has that covered, as well as the great cast, will undoubtedly bring in audiences. But that principle doesn't always work out; the effects and cast don't make a good movie unless they've got a strong story to work alongside. Many cinemagoers are getting bored of repetitive blockbuster tropes; already this year, the big, flashy *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* has opened to spectacular sales only to quickly fizzle out due to poor word of mouth and reviews. Will *Independence Day: Resurgence* retain the big, dumb charm of the original, or will it just be big and dumb? Planet Earth will find out soon...

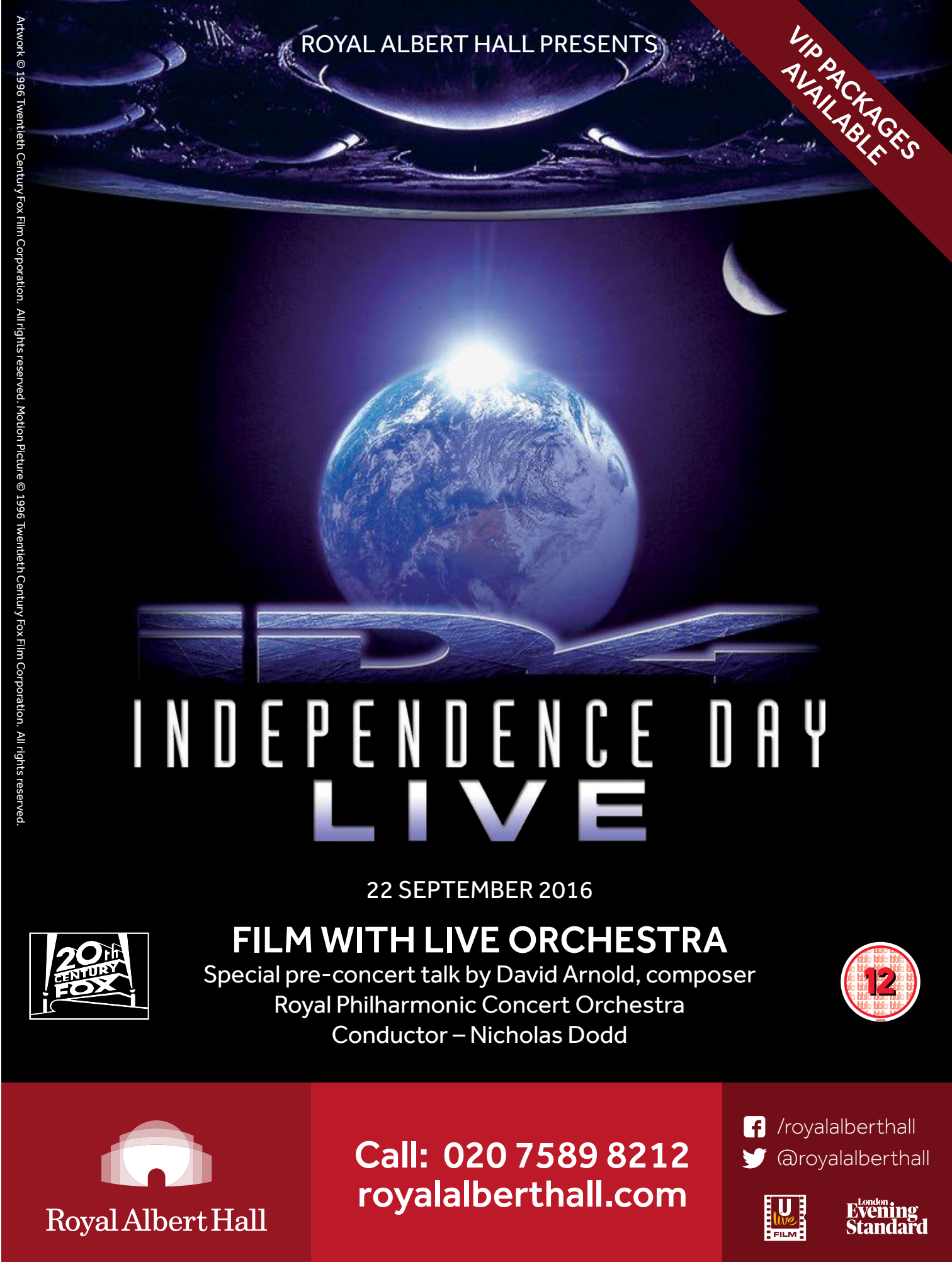


INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE blasts loudly into cinemas on June 24th.

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THE ALIENS ARE COMING!

Extraterrestrial
Invasion films
from the 1950s to
the present



BY
ROBERT
MARTIN

As we prepare for another attack from creatures from another world, we look back at the history of cinematic space attacks...

Alien invasion movies have been around since the dawn of cinema. In fact, if you think about it, when Georges Méliès made *A Trip to the Moon* in 1902, we were the aliens invading a new world, and we've been invading ever since... But what about when we get paid a visit from our intergalactic neighbours?

From the classic paranoia sci-fi of the 1950s to the body horror of the '80s; from intergalactic full-on wars to creepy alien abductions, they've come in many

forms over the years, but what exactly constitutes an invasion film? Was Earth invaded during *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*? Not really... Does finding out that your stepmother is an alien count? Let's say no to that one... Do abduction films count? No, actually...

Invasion. Some can even be a small-scale invasion. Mainly though, it's about conflict, it's about attack, it's about the possible end of the human race. It's about war and, let's face it, at

the end of the 1940s, people were pretty familiar with these ideas. WW2 had left the world changed forever, and there was a belief that, as the richest economy in the world, America could go on to create a peaceful future. But with the bomb emerging as the great symbol of the era, the new threat of communism, not helped by US involvement in the Korean War, and the rise of Senator Joe McCarthy, whose Communist witch hunts would create an unparalleled level of suspicion and insecurity amongst American people,

science fiction was ripe for exploiting the uncertainties and fears of the times.

This not only gave rise to the glut of atomic mutant films like *Tarantula* and *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, it allowed Hollywood to exploit peoples' fear of a Communist invasion via the phenomenon of the flying saucer.

1951 saw two absolute alien invasion classics released, both very different to each other in their approach and in their message.

The Thing from Another World is arguably best known today for its gruesome remake (more on that later), but still stands as one of the landmark invasion films of all time. When a group of scientists and military officers in a remote Arctic research facility discover something buried in the ice, they find out to their cost that some things should be left well alone. As the menacing being thaws, having hibernated for perhaps thousands of years, the film becomes a brilliantly effective thriller ride; a tense, considered, witty example of how to wring tension out of the simplest of situations. Although to modern audiences, the sight of sturdy actor James Arness with a slightly lumpy head is far from chilling, there's no getting away from the fact that this classic alien invasion film set a template which would be followed for years to come. As a metaphor for the Cold War, it couldn't be more obvious, but using the base as a microcosm of US society allowed the film to really get under the skin of its audience, and it really set the template for future horrors in a big way – you can see its influence in *Dark Star* and, in particular, *Alien*.

In the same year, humanity was threatened in a different way in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. This cautionary tale wore America's fear of the nuclear age on its space-suited sleeve as a flying saucer, its alien occupant, and his menacing robot, appear to warn us that we must start to live more peacefully or be destroyed, as our weapons could threaten the stability of other planets and their lifeforms. Just a few years later, the first film adaptation of H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* saw that annihilation take place. Its Oscar-winning effects terrified audiences and, despite Spielberg's excellent 2005 remake, the original remains the superior experience.

Whilst all three of these invasion films are considered classic, they have one thing in common, which our next film would do away with. We won. The good old human race comes through and lives to fight another day. But in 1956, the decade's finest invasion film didn't let us off so lightly. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is a masterpiece of paranoia, in which a doctor, dealing with increasing numbers of people who are convinced that their loved ones have been replaced by doppelgängers, slowly realises that





the occupants of his small town are actually being duplicated by emotionless alien invaders that grow via pods. As the invaders start to get the upper hand, tension is racked up to fever pitch, added to by the revelation that they get to you while you sleep, creating the horrifying situation of characters trying to stay awake constantly, whilst not knowing for sure if the people they are with are human or not. The direction (by the legendary Don Siegel), script and performances are uniformly superb and the small town setting adds to the creepiness of the situation, making this expertly crafted exercise in fear one of the greatest alien invasion films of all time. Even its various remakes have been superior to many others of their ilk, particularly the fantastic Philip Kaufman version starring Donald Sutherland from 1978, where Communist fears were replaced by a socio-political undercurrent of the need to conform. But it's the '56 version that resonates the most, portraying a sense of dreadful paranoia hardly matched since.

The 1950s was perhaps the golden era of the alien invasion film, other notable examples being *The Blob*, *Invaders from Mars* and the notorious *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, but the genre took a decade off in the 1960s making way for biblical epics, historical dramas and the British kitchen sink movement, but by the 1970s, a change of trend in horror would make alien invasion films ripe for revival towards the close of the decade.

Religion gave horror fans a good run for their money in the 1970s, with the likes of *The Exorcist* and *The Omen* doing a fine job of scarring the bejesus out of the cinema-going public. At the same time, science fiction hit a boom period, with *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (which is more a contact than invasion film), and the sci-fi/horror daddy, *Alien*, all contributing to the re-invigoration of the genre. By 1980, God was dead, and a different fear was taking over. No longer was the soul in danger. The threat was from within. Hello, body horror.

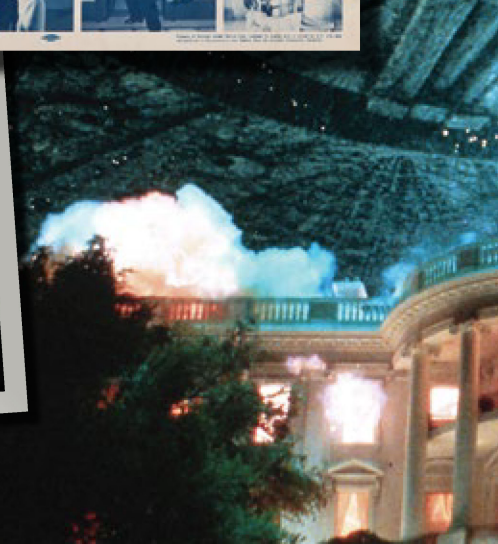
As exemplified in the work of David Cronenberg, body horror grew like a running sore throughout the film industry when, with real life horrors like AIDS

making those of make-believe gods and devils seem trivial, writers and directors started to look inwards for their stories.

The revival of science fiction and the emergence of body horror would bring about THE seminal alien invasion film. In the same year that *E.T.* was moving us all to tears and making us want to get a pet, John Carpenter's remake of *The Thing* nose-dived at the box office, but went on to become one of the most beloved and revered films of all time.

Much like that year's *Blade Runner*, which was released in the States on the same day, *The Thing* is remarkable not only as a film, but as a cultural phenomenon. Watching it now, it's almost impossible to reconcile the negative reviews and lacklustre financial performance of a movie, which is now almost universally acknowledged as the definitive alien invasion film.

Taking the same basic premise as the 1950s original, this version follows the source novella, John W. Campbell, Jr's *Who Goes There?*, more closely with special effects now allowing for a creature that could morph into



the shape of any living organism. Unlike its predecessor, in which the alien was an external entity, this version sees the all-male team of scientists desperately trying to remain sane, as nobody is sure who is human and who isn't; much like the situation in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, but to a greater level of paranoia.

The Thing doesn't put a foot or a tentacle wrong. Whether it's the brilliant cast, the ice-cold score, stunning cinematography or astonishing (even by today's standards) visual effects, *The Thing* surely has to rank as the all-time great alien invasion film. It's unsurpassed in its terrifying ability to create an atmosphere of unease, tension and suspicion, and is arguably Carpenter's finest achievement.

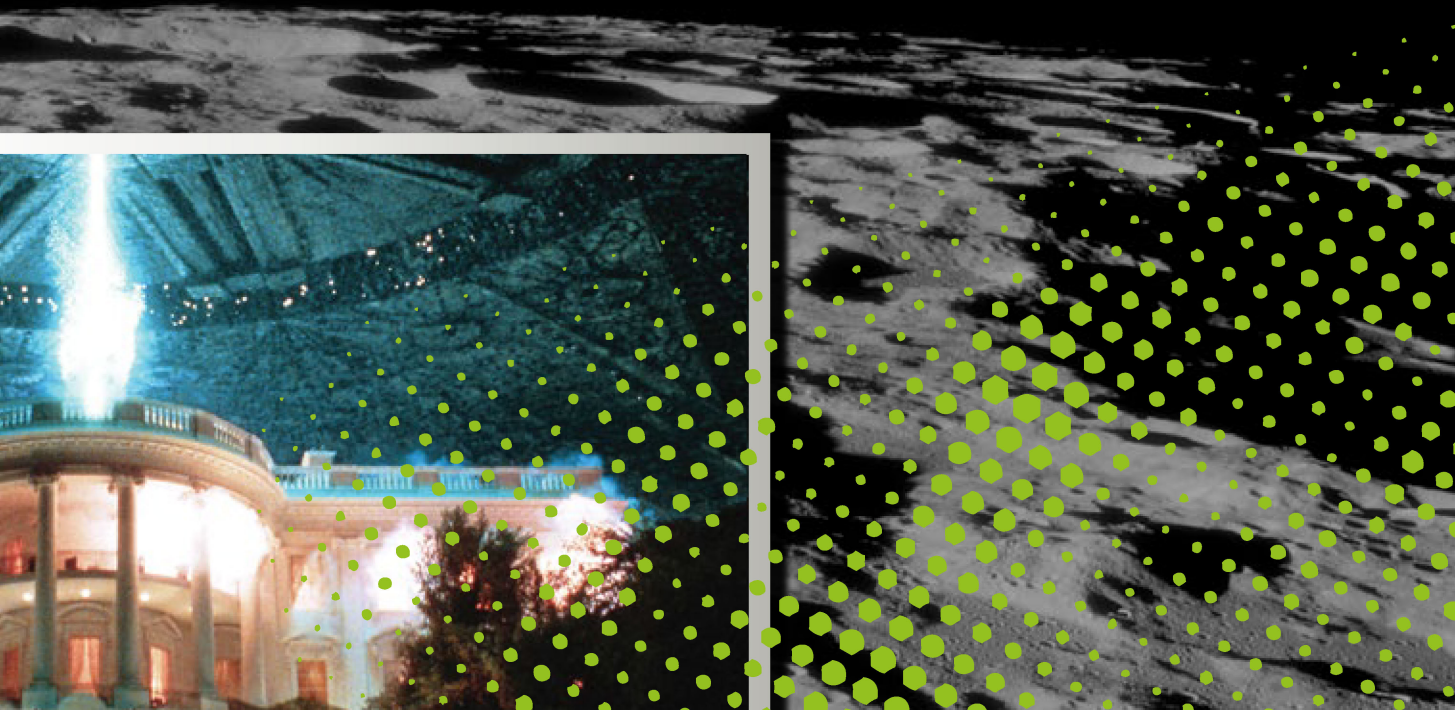
But *The Thing* wasn't the only great invasion film of the '80s. Both *Predator* and *The Abyss* came along that decade too, offering very different perspectives on alien intentions. *Predator*, in particular left an impact, what with its future cross-pollination with the *Alien* franchise.



Jumping ahead to the '90s, two films stand out, both dealing with full-scale invasions but in very different ways. 1996 saw both *Independence Day* and *Mars Attacks!* hit cinema screens. Perhaps the only major film to be based on a set of trading cards (we'll forget *The Garbage Pail Kids Movie*, shall we?), Tim Burton's *Mars Attacks!* is an all-star delight of a film, striking just the right balance of homage to the films that came before it, gloriously camp humour and utter parody. The sadistic Martians are pure evil, hilariously cackling away unintelligibly and mocking all human attempts to curb their sadistic plans to invade Earth and rid the place of all of us. Performances, art direction, music and the effects perfectly capture the feel of the invasion films of the 1950s but with tongue firmly in cheek. Watching their heads explode is Slim Whitman's country music is one of alien invasion cinema's most enjoyable moments.

Meanwhile, *Independence Day* takes its subject much more seriously, coming across as a combination of '70s disaster flick mixed with full-on war film. At first, the arrival of the massive alien craft seems benign, but when the destruction starts, it packs a mighty

punch. The classic shot of the exploding White House and the devastation of major cities certainly helped *Independence Day* to become a major worldwide hit, taking in over \$800m on a \$75m budget. Whilst the film divides audiences, with criticism of jingoism and stereotypical characters, it's a fine action film and one which finally spawned a long-awaited sequel [see our preview on page 14].





A year later, along came the *Men In Black* and a year after that, the first of the *X-Files* films brought Mulder and Scully to the big screen, its long-running plot thread of alien DNA implanted within the human race taking the spotlight, but it's not really until 2008's *Cloverfield* that we get another notable invasion film.

The handheld, found footage subgenre of film met alien invasion head on, in this brilliant cross between *The Blair Witch Project* and *Godzilla*. A group of friends recording the leaving party of one of their pals keep on recording as something huge attacks the city, while thousands of crawling insect-like creatures pose a threat all of their own on both the ground and underground. *Cloverfield* is a fantastic invasion film that places the viewer directly inside the danger, the now-overused handheld device working to brilliant advantage as we see the invasion through the eyes of the protagonists. Its intensity is amplified by this technique and both the monster alien and the smaller ones are truly wonderful/terrifying. It took a while, but this year's sequel of sorts surprised everyone with its different take on what had gone before.



The decade also saw the underrated *Signs* bring in some big box office, the *Transformers* films smash onto our screens and the alien invasion comedy *Evolution* provide some alien laughs, although *Paul* some years later would provide the best alien comedy of the century...

In the UK, where alien invasion films have given us some genuine classics (*Quatermass and the Pit*) and some genuine stinkers (*Lifeforce* and no, it is not a forgotten classic), *Attack the Block* provided a perfect blend of comedy, aliens and British sarcasm, as a bunch of initially unlikeable hoodies take on a marauding alien force in a London tower block. Cleverly taking the theme of urban alienation and making it literal, *Attack the Block* is an unexpected pleasure that works on many levels, and provided an early role for *Star Wars* hero John Boyega.

This decade, the enormous success of *Avengers Assemble* is particularly gratifying to those of us who consider *Buffy* creator Joss Whedon to be a genius. Of course, it's usually classified as a superhero film but, let's face it, when those skies open that's a full scale alien invasion going on. And it's spectacular as hell. *Edge of Tomorrow*, *Man of Steel*, and *Pacific Rim* also impacted, all big budget, all-out action films showing alien invasion on a massive scale.

And yet, arguably, the most outstanding alien invasion film of recent times is also one of the lowest-key, most mysterious and challenging. The disturbing masterpiece that is Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin*, is a deeply disturbing film of invasion in which the title describes both the film's effect on the viewer and the fate of the alien. Scarlett Johansson is astonishingly good as the alien in a transit van, stalking the men of Glasgow,

wandering around shopping centres and luring her prey to a horrifying fate, which we assume is nourishing the alien homeland. Yet it's the alien's self-discovery, its realisation of what 'human' is, which makes this science fiction invasion film a cut above the rest. As intelligent as *2001*, as enigmatic as *The Man Who Fell To Earth* and as challenging as the very best that sci-fi cinema can be, *Under the Skin* is the antithesis of its fellow alien invasion blockbusters, including the one Johansson also stars in. Watching this film, the thought that the invasion has been quietly going on for years doesn't feel like such an alien concept...

So there you have it. From those '50s invasion films we appear to have come full circle, where the latest and best example creates an eerily paranoid experience in which things really are not what they seem. And if Scarlett Johansson can really stroll unnoticed through a Glasgow shopping centre, the aliens should have no trouble walking amongst us when they actually do decide to invade.





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by
Samantha
Ward

The Ten Worst Alien Invasion Films

As we take a look at the ten worst alien invasion films, you may notice a rather prominent pattern of ridiculous plots and dreadful dialogue. These cringeworthy films somehow made their way onto our screens, so we may as well celebrate the absurdities that are out there for our viewing pleasure, and also, the ones we should probably avoid entirely.

PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE 1959

Aliens resurrect Bela Lugosi and Vampira, among many of the Earth's dead. With a preposterous plan to stop mankind from destroying the universe using a sun-driven bomb known as a 'Solaranite'. This ridiculous plot will surely get you thinking, *this must be so bad it has to be good*, but you won't find it as funny as you think. The shoddy production value and hammy characters surely give the film that B-movie charm, but the pace is so slow and mundane, it's difficult to make it all the way to the end. The infamous filmmaker Ed Wood went above and beyond to certify his reputation as the worst director with the worst movie ever.



MARS NEEDS WOMEN 1967

This straight to television movie became a cult hit for its hilarious late night viewing. Other than its goofy plot in which Martians invade Earth in search of the best female specimens, the shoddy production value and sombre approach unintentionally make for an amusing time. Director Larry Buchanan, the self-proclaimed schlockmeister, dishes out all the cheese and absurdity with *Mars Needs Women*. You may find the title familiar as it's been referenced in a fair few music albums and TV shows, including a track on Rob Zombie's *Hellbilly Deluxe 2*.



BREEDERS 1986

Just when you think it couldn't get any worse than a serial rapist, it does. Acid-oozing aliens are reproducing themselves by impregnating human women, turning them into subdued vessels. With little plot, the film is very much a diabolical orgy of grotesque body horror. What could have been an interesting concept is horribly executed with corny dialogue and careless character development. An eyesore enhanced by the awful make-up effects and poor production value.



SPECIES 1995

A killer alien in the form of a beautiful seductress has landed on earth. Scientists must find and stop her before she successfully breeds with humans. If *Species* was supposed to be some sexy and scary thriller to excite adolescent boys, then it's well done, but for everyone else, it doesn't really hold up. Cheap thrills are not enough to keep this film entertaining. One interesting fact behind this film, however, is that there is a following of people who actually believe the premise to be true.

BATTLEFIELD EARTH 2000

John Travolta really knows how to pick 'em. *Battlefield Earth* is a shabby sci-fi story based on L. Ron Hubbard's novel. It's the year 3000 and humans are slaves to an alien race known as Psychlos. It's a ludicrous plot that makes us humans look terribly stupid after it's taken them all this time to use ancient technology to defeat their alien oppressors. Winner of seven Razzie awards after its initial release, it then went on to claim more years later, putting it at a whole *nine* Razzies. It's become somewhat of a cult film being placed in the 'so bad, it's good' category, but even that gives it too much praise.



EVOLUTION 2001

A meteor harbouring extraterrestrial life crash lands in Arizona. A group of scientists investigate and soon discover a rapidly evolving alien species. Originally meant to be a horror/sci-fi film, it soon developed into a comedy after director Ivan Reitman re-wrote much of the script. Reitman turned it into a semi-funny sci-fi comedy, ripe with crude and sexual humour. The plot lacks any kind of solidarity and the jokes are incredibly hit and miss. The film does have an interesting cast, with *The X-Files*' own David Duchovny alongside comedy jock Sean William Scott, writer/comedian Orlando Jones, and the prolific Julianne Moore, all making for a rather amusing ensemble.





SIGNS 2002

Not all directors can be consistently good and M. Night Shyamalan proves that with *Signs*. He sells it in the first half of the film; we invest in the characters, the suspense is palpable, and the visuals alone are magnificent. However, it all falls apart structurally and the tension drops when the aliens are gradually revealed, losing all of its momentum and excitement. Aliens come to earth only to be defeated by water? Not even Mel Gibson's intense brow can save this one. It just proves Shyamalan doesn't know when to quit trying to replicate the success of *The Sixth Sense*.

ALIEN VS PREDATOR: REQUIEM 2007

We all love *Alien* and we all love *Predator*, but put them together and what do you get? An awful mess of a film where plot and characters are forgotten in an attempt to create something entirely action-based, though even that turns out to be a disappointment. The fight sequences between the two famous creatures are something to be desired, but if you like watching slippery aliens going at it in the dark then you may just get a kick out of it. What's more disappointing is that *Requiem* is a sequel to what was already a failure in many eyes and The Brothers Strause (directors and brothers Greg and Colin Strause) somehow managed to make it worse.



THE INVASION 2007

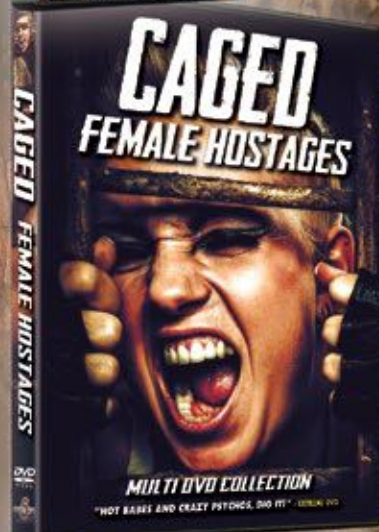
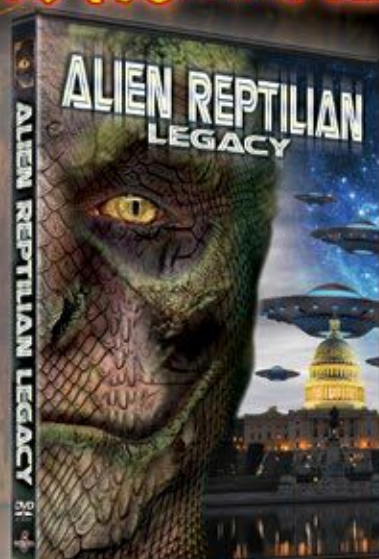
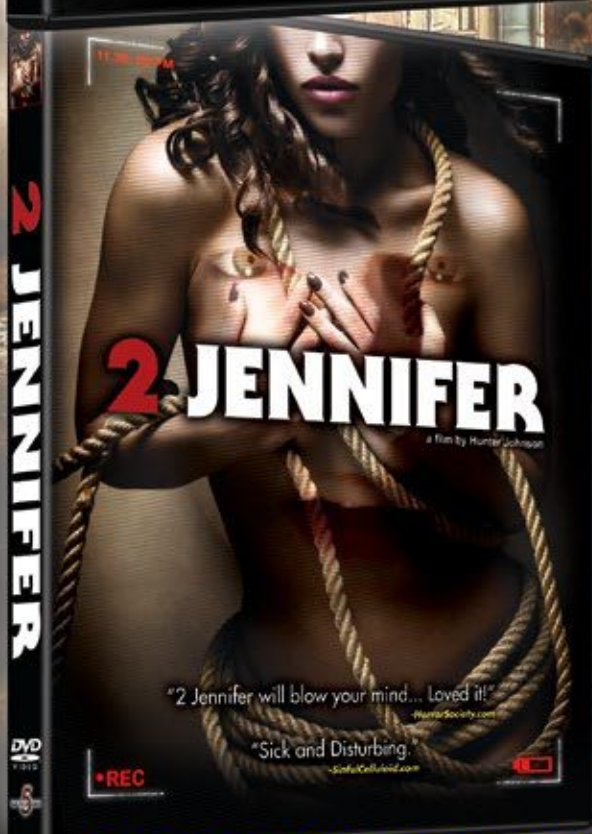
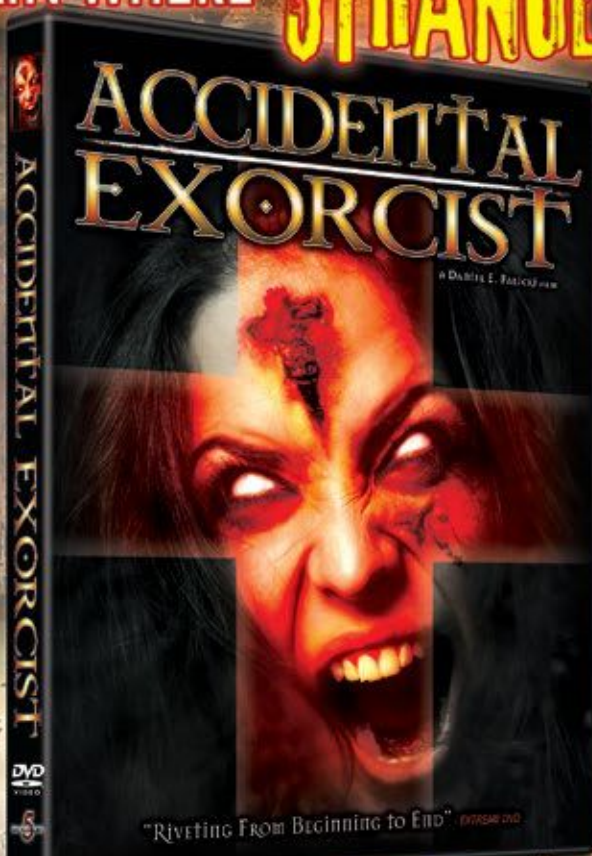
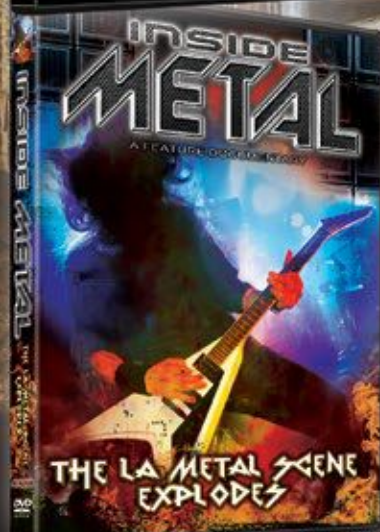
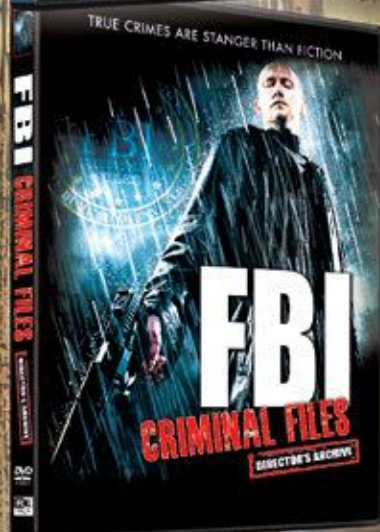
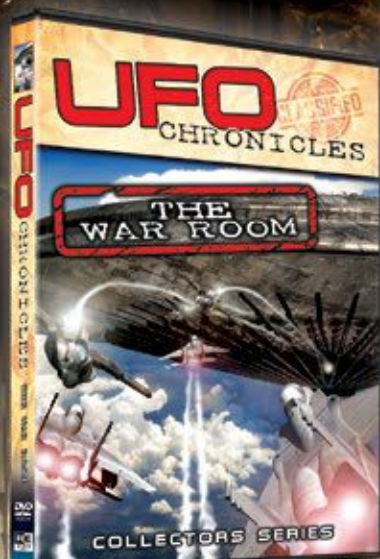
The Invasion is the fourth and worst adaptation of the Jack Finney novel *The Body Snatchers*. For some reason, two remakes was just not enough and they had to go ruin yet another story that was brilliantly presented in its original adaptation. Even the 1978 version starring Donald Sutherland and Jeff Goldblum is placed in high regard. With a second director having been brought in to do additional scenes, there is definitely an inconsistent tone to the film. Daniel Craig's hairdo isn't even enough to keep one amused. With both the 1956 and 1978 *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* still very much in existence, *The Invasion* is just a waste of our precious time.

SKYLINE 2010

Those who have watched *Alien vs Predator: Requiem* should surely be aware that if The Brothers Strause are behind another alien invasion film, then low expectations must be made. Seriously, keep them buried deep in the earth's inner crust before you watch *Skyline*. Los Angeles is under attack, yet the drama of personal issues still unfold in the most ridiculous way. Underdeveloped characters with no personality, the aliens can take them for all we care! With bad CGI, sketchy set pieces, annoying characters and a terrible plot (we could go on), how could it *not* be on this list? The unfortunate and disastrous final act hints towards a sequel - let's just hope the studio doesn't get that desperate.



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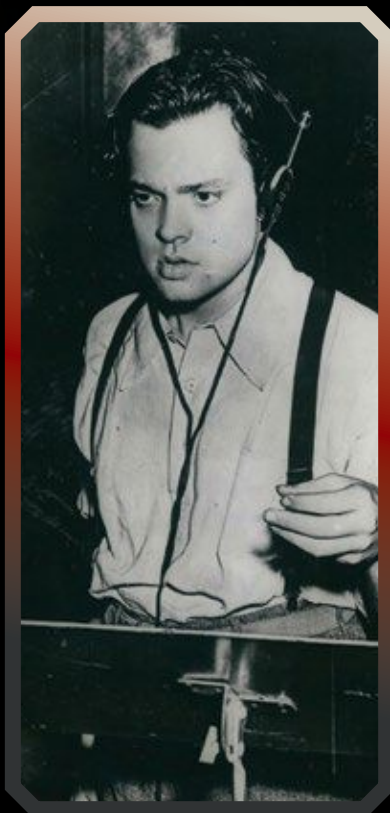




With our focus on the invasion of Earth from outer space, and a new TV series of **WAR OF THE WORLDS** mooted for 2017, **STARBURST** looks back at an already long list of adaptations made from H. G. Wells' classic story.

By Jon Towilson

TRIPOD TERRORS!



"Across the gulf of space, minds that are to our minds as ours are to those of the beasts that perish, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded this earth with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew their plans against us."

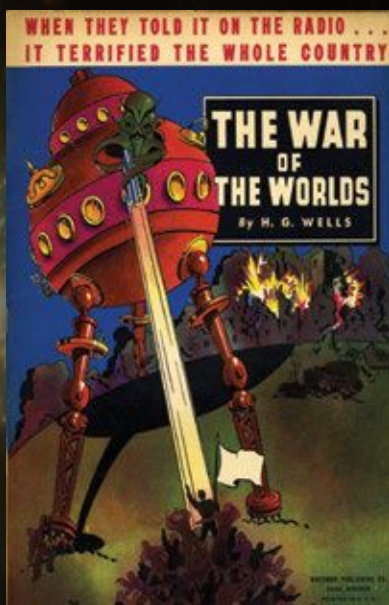
When Herbert George Wells wrote those words in 1897, as the opening to his then-latest serialisation for *Cosmopolitan* magazine, tentatively titled *The War of the Worlds*, little did he know that he was, in fact, penning what is now considered to be the first extraterrestrial invasion narrative; one that would (like Wells' *The Time Machine*) span the decades in numerous adaptations for film, television, radio, games, comics, even music.

Part love story, part imperialist allegory, and part scientific prophecy, *The War of the Worlds* has captivated generations with its terrifying vision of a Martian attack on our planet, one which we humans are powerless to fight, and whose outcome is determined instead by 'the humblest things that God, in his wisdom, has put upon this earth'.

The first adaptation of Wells' work remains the most infamous of all. In 1938, Orson Welles and his Mercury Theatre Company broadcast a version

for radio that would become a social phenomenon in its own right - and not necessarily in a good way. Welles was, at that time, in his early twenties and already a celebrated actor, writer and director on Broadway. The Mercury Theatre had enjoyed huge success with a string of Shakespeare adaptations, including a version of *Macbeth* with an entirely African-American cast. Welles and his company had subsequently branched out to radio, which was then still a new and exciting medium. Much in demand, the insanely busy Welles had even taken to travelling from theatre appearances to radio station gigs in a private ambulance. Mercury had already given radio broadcasts of *Dracula* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and was looking for a new and exciting way to adapt Wells' novel. The Young Turk came up with the idea of presenting the story as a live news broadcast, with events seeming to unfold as they actually happened. It must have seemed like a good - hell, a great - idea at the time, but it was one that would quickly come back to bite Orson the auteur on the arse, as the approach caused something akin to a national panic. Nobody knows for sure how many Americans actually believed what they were hearing was real, but it is said to be in the thousands. Although Welles had, at the start of the show, introduced the broadcast as a

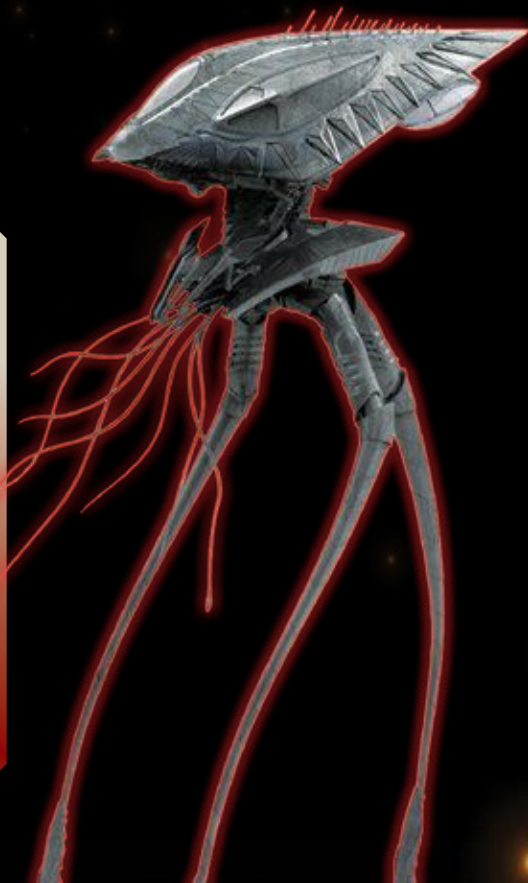
'Mercury Production', many people had tuned in late, not realising that what they were listening to was, in fact, an experimental piece of radio drama, not a real set of newscasts. It seems hard to believe now, especially as the show went out on Halloween night, October 31st, 1938! On the other hand, many Americans were already in an anxious frame of mind, given that war clouds were forming in Europe after Hitler had set his sights on annexing Czechoslovakia; testament, perhaps, to the enduring themes and concerns of H. G. Wells' story, that repeatedly tap into our underlying socio-political fears. Either way, Orson Welles was forced to apologise for the broadcast (even though it ultimately led to a Hollywood contract and *Citizen Kane*), and the panic that had resulted from it led many sociologists to fret over the power of the media to seemingly influence people's behaviour.



When RKO courted Welles with the offer of a Hollywood contract, it was with a screen adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* in mind; Welles, however, had other plans, such as directing the greatest film ever made, and never got the chance to turn his hand to sci-fi. In fact, the screen rights were, and always have been, owned by Paramount and it would be another fourteen years before George Pal turned out his classic version. Perhaps the time was right in 1953 for the first film adaptation. Special effects had advanced to the stage where it was possible to make flying saucers look believable on the screen, and the Cold War had everyone anxious about imminent annihilation at the hands of the Russians. The sighting, by pilot Kenneth Arnold in 1947, of the first reported unidentified flying objects (over Mount Rainier in Washington State) had also led to a national obsession with UFOs. Pal wisely updated and uprooted Wells'

novel to '50s America, boosted the love story element, and in the process turned *The War of the Worlds* (1953, directed by Byron Haskin) into a thinly veiled allegory of the Red Scare.

Gene Barry plays Dr Clayton Forrester, a government scientist involved in the Manhattan Project, who is drafted in when Martians attack Southern California. With romantic interest Sylvia Van Buren (Ann Robinson), he tries to find a biological means to defeat the enemy. The army, meanwhile, resorts to nuclear weapons in an attempt to destroy the invaders. When this fails, all that is left for the survivors to do is pray.



Just as the invaders are about to zap the church where the lovers are hiding out, they fall prey to the Earth's bacteria to which they have no immunity, dying from, what is, in effect, a bad dose of the flu.

Although dated by its Cold War setting and conventional '50s sci-fi love story subplot, Pal's version remains memorable for its startling Technicolor and its still-chilling early scenes of the Martian mantas firing their heat-rays on unsuspecting Earthlings. Coming as it did near the start of the golden age of bug-eyed monster sci-fi, Pal's film showed that the themes of Wells' novel could remain relevant throughout the decades. Paramount, however, would keep a firm hand on the screen rights, and it would be another fifty years until another official screen version would be made.

By far the most popular adaptation has - uniquely - been as a piece of music. In 1976, jingle composer and David Essex



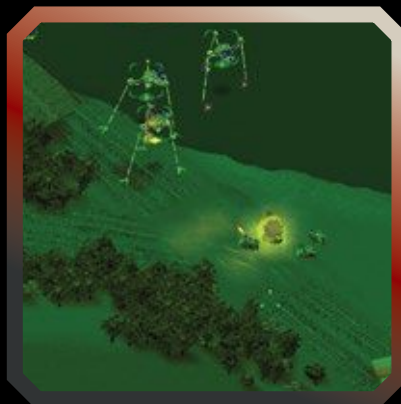
collaborator Jeff Wayne, convinced CBS to allow him to record a double concept album based on Wells' story. Taking almost three years to record and nearly a quarter of a million pounds to produce (making it the most expensive record ever made at that point), Jeff Wayne's *Musical Version of The War of the Worlds*, an imaginative mix of spoken narration, sound effects, and pop tunes, shot into the UK charts where it remained for a staggering 245 weeks. Spawning several hit singles along the way, including the

haunting *Forever Autumn*, Wayne's LP has become a phenomenon in its own right. Despite sitting somewhere between Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* and the soundtrack to *Grease* in most people's record collections, and no doubt having been mistaken at the time of its release for the latest by the equally UFO-loving Electric Light Orchestra, Wayne's musical curiosity has proven to have remarkably long term appeal. In 2006, Wayne finally took his production on the road as a stage show, combining live orchestra, actors, film projection, and a giant plaster-cast head of Richard Burton as the narrator. Ten years later, the stage show tour is still going strong, and in February this year made its West End debut at the Dominion theatre, with a 3D hologram of Liam Neeson taking the Burton role.

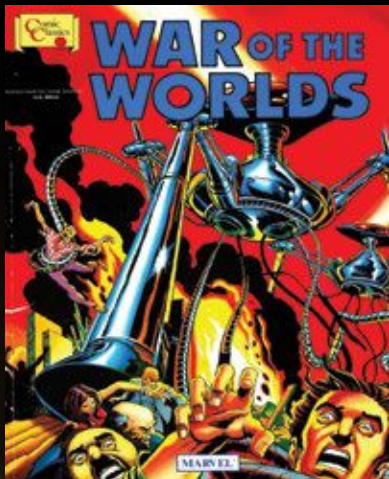
The extraordinary success of Wayne's 1978 musical version spawned spin-offs in other media too. In 1979, Cinematronics produced an arcade game of *The War of the Worlds*, essentially as a variation of the then-incredibly popular *Space Invaders*. The game itself was pretty straightforward: tripod walkers advance on the screen, and you have to



stop them by blasting their legs away with a tank weapon. But it never caught on and is now incredibly rare and hard to find, even in vintage arcades. Another failure was the ZX Spectrum game, directly based on the musical version, using Wayne's music. Released in 1984 by CRL Group, reviewers panned it as slow-moving. In 1998, Pixelogic developed a game for PlayStation that was again based on the Jeff Wayne version, with more of the music and boasting graphics similar to the album cover. This game takes place in



the 1890s, and allows the player to move between various urban and countryside locations in England, whilst combating the Martians from armed vehicles. Despite generally positive reviews, Pixelogic never released the game in North America.



Of the plethora of comic adaptations, the first - and some say still the best - appeared in 1955, in the aftermath of the Pal/Haskin movie. Published by The Gilberton Company as part of their Classics Illustrated series, the story (written by Harry Miller, with artwork by Lou Cameron) stuck pretty closely to Wells' original. Marvel Classics mounted another adaptation in 1976, and this one was much more hard-hitting: its scenes of the tripods torching human bodies and exploding buildings - society graphically destroyed by interplanetary war - anticipate the visceral power of Spielberg's 2005 movie. Written by Christopher Claremont (one of the originators of the X-Men), with art by Yong Montano, this is generally considered the best comic book adaptation so far. A 72 page graphic novel followed in 2006, published by Dark Horse and written by Ian Edginton, with art by D'Israeli. Along the way there have been further adaptations by Eternity Comics, Arrow Comics and DC, amongst others.

The Eternity Comics version coincided with the first TV adaptation. In 1988, producer Greg Strangis and Paramount Television mounted a Canadian/American co-production that ran for two seasons, from October 1988 to May 1990. Drawing more on the 1953 film than the Wells novel, Strangis threw in a little of the '60s hit series *The Invaders* (A Quinn Martin Production) for good measure. The result was typical '80s telly fodder. Starting from the fairly preposterous premise that the Martians had not really been defeated in 1953, but had fallen into suspended animation (and that widespread amnesia combined with government cover-up had made the population more or less forget the Martian attack had ever happened), the plot involved a group of terrorists who accidentally awaken the aliens from their slumber. Just like in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the aliens take over the bodies of the humans and embark on a search for a means of inoculating themselves against the Earth's bacteria. The series actually featured some notable talent in front of and behind the camera, such as director William Fruet, who made the cult classics *Death Weekend* and *Spasms*, and Ann Robinson, reprising her role as Sylvia Van Buren. Unfortunately, even they could not salvage scripts that featured cardboard characters doing plastic things and some of the worst dialogue ever committed to paper ("It's hard to believe that the future of our planet lies in the hands of the phone company!"). After 43 episodes, *War of the Worlds* itself went into hibernation, where it would stay until the UK's Horror Channel recently revived it and gave it pride of place in the afternoon schedules as an endearing slice of sci-fi retro-trash.

In 2005, Steven Spielberg embarked on an epic update of the Wells novel, imbuing it with a post-9/11 paranoia that is almost palpable. Say what you will about Spielberg's version (Tom Cruise as 'bad dad made good' doesn't really fit the



Wells vision), it features some of the most terrifying and visually intense imagery of any of the adaptations. Who can forget scenes of the tripods harvesting human beings as feed for Martian red weed? The relentless intergalactic genocide of Spielberg's film, and the horrifying idea that the Martians are not just exterminating us but using us as human fertiliser in their colonisation of our planet, are straight out of Wells' novel.

Thus, H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* remains depressingly relevant across the generations. At the time it was written in 1898, it seemed not only to comment on the expansionism of the British Empire, but to foretell where warfare itself was headed; from the mechanised mass slaughter of the First World War, the threat of nuclear destruction in the Cold War to the ever-present fear of terrorist attack post-9/11. And with UK production company Mammoth Screen currently developing a new TV series of *The War of the Worlds* (with Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell writer Peter Harness handling the adaptation) that returns the story to a British setting and Wells' time period, the carnage looks set to continue. Let's hope it is only on screen...



OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS
FROM THE WORLDS
OF DOCTOR WHO
WITH KIERON MOORE



Introducing Pearl Mackie as Bill

After much speculation, the BBC has announced that Pearl Mackie is the actress set to play the Doctor's new companion, Bill, in the upcoming tenth series of **Doctor Who**.

Mackie's casting was revealed during the half time of some football show (as sci-fi fans, we were quite confused) with the broadcast of a specially recorded scene, featuring Peter Capaldi's Doctor and his new best friend Bill being shot at by some stock footage of a Dalek. Though little has been revealed about Bill's background, fan reaction to the character seems positive, with many comparing her sense of humour in the face of danger to Donna Noble and her relationship with Capaldi's Doctor to that of Ace and the Seventh Doctor.

Mackie has a strong theatrical CV, and is currently appearing in **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time** in the West End, but is relatively new to the world of TV, having appeared in ... erm ... bear with us while we check IMDb ... an episode of BBC daytime soap **Doctors!** Despite this, though, she clearly impressed **Doctor Who**'s casting team, who met with seventy potential actors before recalling five for screen tests with Capaldi, then finally settled on Mackie.

On joining the cast, Mackie said: "I'm incredibly excited to be joining the **Doctor Who** family. It's such an extraordinary British institution, I couldn't be prouder to call the TARDIS my home! Peter Capaldi is such a brilliant actor, and his Doctor is such a wacky and wonderful character, I can't wait to see what adventures are in store for him and Bill throughout time and space. Reading the script at the audition, I thought Bill was wicked. Fantastically written, cool, strong, sharp, a little bit vulnerable with a bit of geekiness thrown in - I can't wait to bring her to life, and to see how she develops through the series."

We at STARBURST would like to welcome Mackie to the world of **Doctor Who**, and can't wait to see Bill's adventures with the Doctor when Series Ten is broadcast in early 2017.

Chibnall Considering Writers' Room

Looking further into the future, some intriguing news has surfaced about the 2018 series, which will be Chris Chibnall's first year as showrunner. The **Broadchurch** writer is considering introducing a US-style writers room, in which several writers would be kept on staff in the show's Cardiff offices and would work together to plot out both the series' arc and individual episodes. This practice is uncommon in British TV, due to budgetary reasons and to writers being spread out across the country, but as one of the BBC's flagship dramas, **Doctor Who** may be the perfect show to try it out on. The collaborative style has helped many American dramas retain a consistent high quality – and, let's face it, if there's one word rarely used to describe **Doctor Who**, it's consistent.

Another Year, Another Hugo Nomination

Last year's episode *Heaven Sent* has been nominated for a Hugo award. The episode was written by Steven Moffat, directed by Rachel Talalay, and starred Peter Capaldi running around a mysterious castle on his own, lost and isolated in the wake of Clara Oswald's death. In the Best Dramatic Presentation (Short Form) category, the episode is up against episodes of **Grimm**, **Jessica Jones**, **Supernatural**, and **My Little Pony** (though that last one's the fault of some right wing vandals who are throwing their toys out of the pram in the form of nomination rigging - for more information, see **Brave New Words** on page 94).

Six **Doctor Who** stories have previously won the award, most recently *The Doctor's Wife* in 2012. Moffat's *Listen* was nominated last year, but lost out in the final voting. Whether the show will have more luck this year will be determined when the Hugo winners are announced on August 20th.





L I S T E N

WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK
AT THE WHONIVERSE
BY JR SOUTHALL



There's always been a back and forth between the kind of *Doctor Who* that's good for you and the kind that's not (in the best possible way), ever since the Hartnell historical stories gave way to Troughton's bases under siege – and the general rule of thumb, insofar as the original run was concerned, was that the odd-numbered Doctors would attempt to make you a better person while the even-numbered ones would simply go off adventuring. So it was that the politically analogous heavy tenure of the Third Doctor turned into three years at the start of Tom Baker's time that were concerned with little more than scaring the hell out of the junior members of the television audience.

For fans of a certain age, and even for some who aren't, the series presided over by producer Philip Hinchcliffe and his script editor Robert Holmes are very much *Doctor Who*'s Golden Years, a succession of seventeen stories that burned themselves irreversibly onto the retinas of anyone lucky enough to have seen them on transmission. For all the fond memories of giant maggots and giant

spiders, ideas simple and profound enough to work for any generation, the thought of Mummies roaming an English country garden, the half-man half-Dalek making his first unforgettable appearance and the ventriloquist's dummy with his augmented pig's brain are still enough to send a shiver down the spine; they were truly terrifying then and they still are now.

Which begs the question, although these stories don't appear to have had a lasting negative effect on the population at large, was Mary Whitehouse right to complain about the *Doctor Who* of the period? Whitehouse was a moral campaigner, at odds with the way television seemed to be moving further than ever away from the teachings of the Bible, who would constantly and very publicly complain about the violence, swearing and nudity that was increasingly appearing on our screens. Her particular beef with *Doctor Who* was that, as primarily a children's programme, it ought to have been more responsible with the way it chose to visualise the more brutal aspects of its storytelling. Prior to Whitehouse, the series had already had issues in 1964 when Susan

had used scissors to threaten the rest of the TARDIS crew – an action that could easily be copied, with potentially lethal consequences, in homes up and down the country – and Whitehouse's first brush with the series in the 1970s was over similarly domestic imagery in *Terror of the Autons*. Programme makers actually quietly relished Whitehouse's complaints, given that they generally led to increased viewing figures, although between 1975 and 1977 they grew in frequency to such an extent that Hinchcliffe was removed as *Doctor Who*'s producer and his replacement Graham Williams was asked to tone down the violence.

Which means she probably had a point. Jon Pertwee's Venusian Aikido had been a highly formalised style of physical combat quite deliberately and exotically named after a form of self-defence, whereas *The Seeds of Doom* and *The Deadly Assassin* both saw Tom Baker's Doctor indulging in the kind of vicious fisticuffs and rolling around with assailants that parents and teachers would have been trying to eradicate from the playground. Prior to 1976, *Doctor Who* had never shown anything quite as post-

watershed as the bullets puncturing Condo's chest in *The Brain of Morbius*, or the painfully physical transformations of *The Ark in Space* or the aforementioned Krynoid story. "You wouldn't want that served with onions!" feels almost like a self-reflexive comment by author Robert Holmes on the suitability of his *Doctor Who* for children's tea-time viewing.

What Holmes and Hinchcliffe were doing was retooling relatively recent X-certificate movies for the under 18s. It's been said that the pair were inspired by the Hammer movies of the 1950s and 1960s – the *Frankenstein* and *Mummy* homages in *Doctor Who* are noticeably more Hammer than Universal – but their plundering didn't stop there, stretching to RKO's *The Thing from Another World* and AIP's *The Masque of the Red Death*. Hinchcliffe and Holmes were happy to pillage material from pretty much anywhere in their quest to add slightly older viewers to the 'eight to twelve-year-olds' that Barry Letts had principally been coveting. Robert Holmes even admitted that he saw the series' core audience as the "intelligent fourteen-year-old" and that ten-year-olds oughtn't to be watching unsupervised, but the truth is that parents would simply assume the BBC wouldn't be broadcasting something at half past five or six o'clock on a Saturday evening that wasn't going to be suitable for their children. A report commissioned by Barry Letts in 1969 might have revealed that 58% of *Doctor Who*'s viewership was over the age of fifteen, but what's more remarkable is that more than 40% of its audience was younger. Letts and his second-in-command Terrance Dicks were, after that initial hiccup with living killer dolls in 1971, much more careful with what they chose to show, preferring instead a liberal political undercurrent, and stories that engaged because of their fantastical ideas rather than how much bed-wetting terror could be wrung from them. Giant spiders notwithstanding.

Doctor Who's transmission slot probably saved it from closer scrutiny in the home. Very few children watching would actually be going to bed immediately afterwards, so it was very rare that the last images they



took to sleep with them were of a drowning Doctor or a twitching disembodied hand. An hour of *The Generation Game* or even *The Duchess of Duke Street* would be enough to remove the immediacy of the imagery for most children, and genuine nightmares as a result of *Doctor Who* were no doubt far fewer in number than they might otherwise have been.

Much as Russell T Davies' caricatured but always socially conscious version of the programme gave way gradually to an era that has generally been outwardly less concerned with the politics of modern life – *The Beast Below* and *Cold Blood* being hangover exceptions from his successor's first series – there was a series in which the old guard and new vision clashed during the Letts handover too; while Series Thirteen and Fourteen are pure, unadulterated Hinchcliffe and Holmes, Series Twelve is an aberration, the stories therein having been mostly commissioned by Hinchcliffe's predecessor but subsequently given a Robert Holmes makeover. Thus *The Ark in Space* and *Revenge of the Cybermen* were

complete rewrites of other people's ideas, while *Genesis of the Daleks* saw the two strands at their most symbiotic. *Genesis of the Daleks* was essentially a script that Barry Letts would have been happy to sign off upon, a generic Terry Nation plot with an added dollop of Davros thrown in to spice things up – at Letts' himself behest – before being spiced up even further by being filtered through David Maloney's direction, undergoing a production much more at home with the explicit approach of Philip Hinchcliffe. David Maloney was in many ways Hinchcliffe and Holmes' Third Man, responsible not just for the overt Nazi imagery of *Genesis of the Daleks* but also the terrifyingly alien *Planet of Evil*, the moral ambiguity of *The Deadly Assassin* and *The Talons of Weng-Chiang* – it's impossible to imagine any other regime of the programme including prostitutes, drug abuse, and enforced suicide, let alone all in one story.

The abbreviated return to a period influenced by recent cinematic horror in the mid-1980s, in which entirely immoral characters were seen dying in obviously violent ways and the contemporary taste for gruesome gore was rendered in any number of sequences of collapsing alien heads emitting all manner of foul oozes, was what ended up costing the series its future. By the time John Nathan-Turner had toned the series down, its popularity had dwindled to the point of no return, audiences in 1985 interested in such things now being able to get their kicks on VHS. Mary Whitehouse would no doubt have suffered conniptions, had Channel 4 not come along to distract her from her crusade. But who knows, maybe if Whitehouse had stemmed the tide after Series Twenty-One the way she had seven years earlier, *Doctor Who* might not have found its feet again and lasted another good seven years and more after that?

The lack of a moral and political focus hasn't done the memory of Series Twelve to Fourteen any harm though. They will always be the pinnacle which modern and future showrunners strive to reach.

ARTWORK BY SIMON BRETT





SOMEWHERE IN TIME

Let us now cast our minds back to 1963. A police box stands in the corner of a junkyard on Totter's Lane - and the irascible elderly-looking captain of what is, actually, a vast time machine beyond the comprehension of even the highest intellects is about to take his beloved granddaughter's teachers on an accidental trip back into the furthest reaches of their own species' history.

And though *The Cave Of Skulls* is not often credited as the start of the 'pure historical', a subgenre within the early years of *Doctor Who*, it does at least set out the basic blueprint for the many other varied examples of stories which fit comfortably into the genre - the main point being that the Doctor has no access to technologies which might be dubbed alien by the watching audience other than the TARDIS itself, and believes that he has to be seen to be allowing recorded history to take the course which will be noted by future generations.

Though, of course, he does give our Palaeolithic ancestors a massive helping hand by inadvertently demonstrating how to make fire - a process which the tribe imbue with an almost magical resonance. "**There was a tree and the creature came from in it. And the fire, it came out of his fingers.**" Help in showing off this amazing new ability came from a humble box of matches, and he's forced to bargain for a return to the 'tree', which now anachronistically resembles a police box, to find more

after he runs out.

Just three episodes later, time has moved on a good few years and *Marco Polo* is next on the list of encounters with real-world history as part of the BBC-wide mission statement, as set out by Lord Reith, to '*inform, educate and entertain*'. This often takes the credit as the first truly pure historical, in that only the white-haired old grump's wits enable he and his companions to survive, as

well as thwart an assassination plot against Kublai Khan.

Alas, a mere three years later, this hands-off approach to history was finished, alongside the Doctor who had helped to shape it in the first place. With William Hartnell's retirement from the role in 1966 came Patrick Troughton, whose second outing as the Second Doctor found him among *The Highlanders* and embroiled in the politics





of the Battle of Culloden.

His former self's words to Barbara in *The Aztecs* possibly ring in his ears; "**You can't rewrite history, not one line!!**" Cynics might note that new *Who*'s attitude to this is probably the exact reverse. But we cannot possibly lay the blame solely at the feet of Russell T Davies and now Steven Moffat for that, can we?

History with no implied alien interference, at least in the Doctor's universe, was touched upon three incarnations later in *Black Orchid*. Viewers convinced the threat was indeed not of this world were shown the reverse, with George Cranleigh having been horribly disfigured and driven mad by his rather unpleasant experiences as a botanist out in South America.

LADY CRANLEIGH: Well, you saw how George looked. The Kojabe Indians did that to him. To them, the black orchid is sacred. And they cut out his tongue. His mind was affected. He was rescued by another tribe, and their chief befriended him and brought him home.

MUIR: Latoni.

LADY CRANLEIGH: Yes. With Latoni and Digby's help, I was able to keep George hidden in the house.

By the time of *The Visitation*, which finds the man who'd helped Lady C's son Charles and his side to a spiffing win out on the cricket pitch present for the Great Fire of London, the rules have changed. And so unfolds the first recorded case of 'aliens did it' in human history. That unfortunate baker's on Pudding Lane does still go up in flames, but not in the way we might think. And there's an alternative explanation for the Black Death, just for clarity's sake.

DOCTOR: The poor old black rat and his flea.
LEADER: The infection it now carries has been genetically re-engineered. Although

heavily infected, it will outlive you all.

DOCTOR: But you'd need thousands of them.

LEADER: I have thousands of them. They are awaiting release in a nearby city.

Their infection will kill every living thing.

DOCTOR: I thought the local plague was already doing that?

All pre-empted by an android dressed up as the Grim Reaper doing its bit to scare this particular bunch of Cockneys. Curse those Terileptils, eh? One of their energy weapons going kaput will later inflict the aforementioned Great Fire upon a populace (already terrified, no doubt), just to make September 2nd, 1666 that bit more wonderful.

This spectacular temporal 'd'oh' moment was recently discussed by a Doctor now indifferent towards cricket, in the form of Peter Capaldi's Twelfth,

Davison's Fifth now long gone; although they share a greater number of similarities than most care to consider.

It did undoubtedly help to lay the foundations for what now appears to constitute an in-depth glimpse at history in the minds of those who've written for Christopher Eccleston's Ninth and the men who followed in his wake - Mark Gatiss' *The Unquiet Dead* offering the first fruits of the policy as the new look (at least on the inside) TARDIS takes its first trip to long ago.

DOCTOR: Oi! I promised you a time machine and that's what you're getting. Now, you've seen the future, let's have a look at the past. 1860. How does 1860 sound?

ROSE: What happened in 1860?

DOCTOR: I don't know, let's find out. Hold on, here we go!

Commendable, at least in spirit.

But then, oh wait, alien influence!

"Something's living inside the gas".

The young apprentice Moffat would then repeat exactly the same trick with his admittedly not-bad-for-a-first-go wartime two-parter *The Empty Child/The Doctor Dances*, before stepping up to the plate as showrunner in his own right. Now then, surely the fact that this pseudo-history has become oh-so predictable is the biggest argument for its at least temporary abandonment.

To paraphrase a great man, it's impossible not to feel as though they've killed an old friend...

And with another curmudgeonly-at-times grey-tinged man at the helm of the good ship TARDIS once more, what better time to resurrect history in its purest sense? Lest we forget its pages are littered with examples of our own kind more monstrous than any imagined alien nasty...

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY



REVIEWS

THE LATEST
DOCTOR WHO
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



DOCTOR WHO: THE TENTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES VOL. 1

WRITER: MATT FITTON, JENNY T. COLGAN, JAMES GOSS / PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / DIRECTOR: NICHOLAS BRIGGS / STARRING: DAVID TENNANT, CATHERINE TATE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The danger was that it might have sounded like some bizarre cover version involving the original artists, as if the Proclaimers had rerecorded 'I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)' and forgotten which key to play it in – the popular complaint surrounding Billie Piper's return in Russell T Davies' fourth series being that she'd forgotten how to 'do' Rose Tyler. And anyone approaching Big Finish's Tenth Doctor Adventures expecting a scale replica of the television version isn't going to be 100% satisfied; this is the Tenth Doctor and Donna doing Big Finish, not Big Finish doing TV Doctor Who. But for anyone already familiar with the company, or anyone happy to accept that this is not some BBC spin-off, but rather a reimagining of a television series for audio, David Tennant and Catherine Tate's return to the roles that made them megastars is glorious and apt, and filled with familiar touches while being a subtly different experience.

The two elements that the company weren't able to port over are perhaps the most prominent; Davies' words and Murray Gold's music. Howard Carter's incidental score doesn't attempt to replicate the latter, settling for invoking its scale and melodic approach, while retaining the Big Finish house feel. It works very well – and the version of the Murray Gold Series Four theme

arrangement should be plenty to send tingles up and down the spines of Doctor-Donna fans everywhere.

The words are a different matter, Davies' entire five years of Doctor Who being a consistent universe – more often than not involving the showrunner providing the words in other people's scripts himself. Here the authors don't have the luxury of Davies rewriting their plots and dialogue, so it's delightful how closely this first volume manages to capture the Doctor and Donna. There are some obvious allusions to, and even steals from, dialogue spoken by the characters back in 2008, but that's just the surface glitter; each of the writers manages to channel the two actors' defining characteristics throughout – with the help of Tennant and Tate's performances, no doubt – regardless of the new situations the Doctor and Donna find themselves in.

And that's where these audio plays might have run adrift, being a quarter of an hour longer than the episodes that inspired them and not having the luxury of visual performances to help carry the stories and relationships along. The writers might have attempted Davies-style stories without the pictures, but a happy medium has been reached whereby a number of his preoccupations are embraced without his style being replicated absolutely. As such, the plots feel like Big Finish stories but with fewer additional characters and locations, letting the main duo shine.

Matt Fitton's Technophobia opens the set, a cousin to Flatline by way of the location of The Big Bang and some of the premise of Peter Dickinson's The Changes. Such is the way of Big Finish, that Fitton can take elements we've seen elsewhere and keep them fresh – the characters being our focus. It's a natural fit for a familiar but reimagined Tenth Doctor and Donna, a couple of years into their 2008 future but still a little in our past. Next comes Time Reaper by Jenny T Colgan, a very human-shaped story in the most sci-fi environment – a planet made entirely of spare parts and with an undercurrent of timey-wimey – maintaining the slightly more tech feel of the collection than Davies would probably have sustained. The illustrations of the Time Reapers are perhaps more suited to television than audio, but otherwise it's a smart story that forefronts the Doctor and Donna, maintaining the balance between TV-style action and the kind of thoughtful approach that audio encourages, with a finely judged

emotional backstory in keeping with Donna's television trajectory.

Finally there's Death and the Queen by James Goss, completing the modern / future / past arrangement of the release. Probably the most playful yet also the most challenging of the three, this finds Donna running off to get married, in a decision as ill-inspired as the last time she attempted to do so – effectively bringing her back to how she entered the Doctor's life. All three stories give a slightly Steven Moffat feel to Big Finish's take on Russell T Davies' format, in essence the best of all possible worlds.

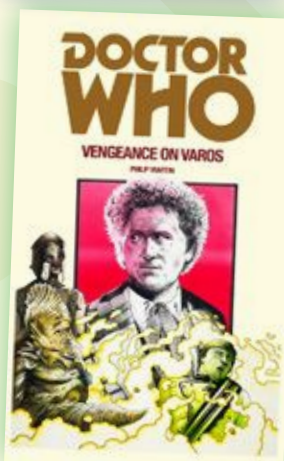
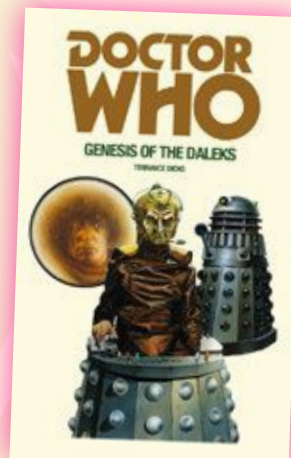
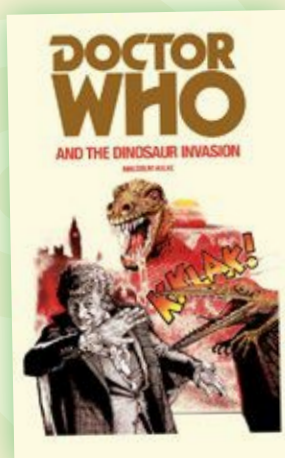
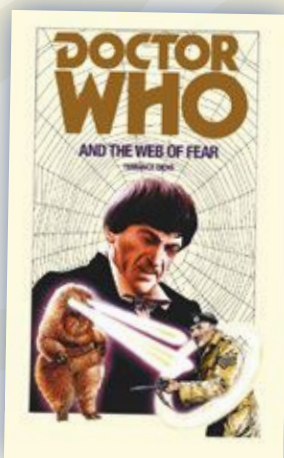
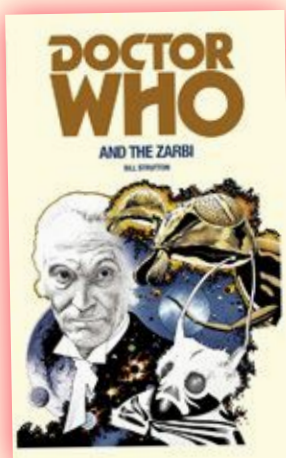
There are a number of familiar guest actors throughout – albeit carefully chosen given that the attention is obviously and rightly going to be elsewhere – giving performances more akin to Big Finish's usual output than the very natural performances the two stars have imported from their time on TV, particularly on the first two episodes. There's the possible threat of a disconnect, but generally, the mood stays the right side of a fine line, as if the TV cast had wandered into the set of the Cushing movies. Any clashing caused soon becomes a part of the experience, and the characters and situations soon divert the attention.

As for Tennant and Tate, they're having an absolute blast. Tennant is perhaps the more natural fit for audio, his vocal gymnastics lending themselves perfectly to the format, but Tate pretty much matches him (The Catherine Tate Show being a fantastic training ground for verbal dexterity), and one of the very few issues is with the dialogue occasionally getting lost in the music – a problem many listeners will find all too familiar. This isn't quite Doctor Who 2008 Revisited, and that's not necessarily a problem; Davies' final full series was the extremity of his emotionally resonant take on Doctor Who, and in other areas it suffered concomitantly. Tennant and Tate were its great success story though, the thing that brought it to a peak of popularity, and even for a reviewer who wasn't overly fond of Tennant's tenth incarnation, it's great to have them back – like a comfortable pair of shoes that haven't been worn in years. The indication here is that there's going to be a lot more where this came from; they're evidently having the times and spaces of their lives.

JR SOUTHALL

★★★★★★★★★ 9

Seven iconic Doctor Who novels – back for the first time



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visionary artist
CHRIS
ACHILLEOS**



Doctor Who Target novels The ultimate Doctor Who fan's keepsake

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LIVVY BOOTE is...

THE GIRL FROM X PLANET X



The intensely popular anime Haikyuu!! has some great characters who all share strong bonds.

I was lucky enough to go to Japan over the summer. An internship in journalism and photography in the one country I had dreamed of visiting since I was 4? It was a dream come true. I had always imagined what Tokyo would be like: neon, *Blade Runner*-esque lights, *Pokémon* adverts everywhere, shrines nestled on street corners, hiding behind a ramen shop. And it was all true. However, one of the many things that surprised me (alongside singing toilets - yes, they exist) was the anime merchandise.

Almost everywhere in Japan sells anime merchandise, regardless of how rural a part you're in, and in Tokyo, there's a district dedicated to anime and technology - Akihabara. On my first day, my natural first port of call was *Animate*. The name pretty much says it all. Walking in, you're hit with a sensory overload - anime soundtracks, colourful cut-outs of characters, and the

aisles are so narrow, the building so thin and squished that you have to squeeze past everyone to get about. But honestly, despite how overwhelming it all was, these weren't even the first things I noticed.

Contrary to what I had anticipated, the stores were not filled with *Sailor Moon* merchandise, *Naruto*, *Bleach*, or even *Pokémon*. It was actually difficult to find any merch from these shows. Instead, I was greeted with posters of basketball players, volleyball teams and boys in very, very small swimming trunks.

It was quite a pleasant surprise, actually. I like sports anime. Lots of people do. Japan adores it right now. It's enormously popular, to the point that there'll be at least one person on your train carriage with *Haikyuu!!* keyrings on their backpack, or wiping their face with a flannel with a boy in swimming trunks on it. Sports anime is fun, silly and inspirational. Plus, there are cute

boys in it. The characters are great. What's not to like?

However, many people, chiefly straight male fans, have issues with sports anime because it's 'gay' - in both the literal and derogatory sense. As the male protagonists practice every day and work towards a tournament, the bond that grows between each of them in these shows means that viewers like to interpret the relationships as romantic. The creators know this, and amp up the gay just the right amount so they won't get into trouble (it'd be socially pretty unacceptable for there to be outright gay characters on Japanese television).

Go onto the YouTube comments, and, as ever, you'll see people whining about this. True, you could watch a video of anything and find stupid comments, but there are varying levels of stupid, and the discussions on sports anime are at the extreme end.

For example, the opening sequence for the anime *Free! Iwatobi Swim Club* has a lot of negative comments on YouTube, such as: "Damn the op is badass, but the anime is soooooo gay."

Basically translated to 'I was going to watch this, but it's gay, so I'm not going to anymore'.

Sports anime are famous for having strong homoerotic subtext. It's about lots of cute, cool guys playing sports together, making strong bonds with each other so that they can perform at their best. And, yes, in some shows the homoerotic tones are strong - barely subtext, more text. But since when did that stop guys watching *Naruto*?

I mean, have you guys seen *Naruto* and *Sasuke*?

Why is this a feminist issue, though? Well, since *Free! Iwatobi Swim Club* was released, the show and many other sports anime like *Haikyuu!!* and *Kuroko No Basuke* have come under fire for being female 'fan-service' - shows created purely for female fans. Whilst anime fans who are women have to deal with the constant levels of objectification within the genre, many straight male fans are outraged by one or two shows about cute anime boys playing sports together. As ever, any show that considers women's interests is attacked. It's either the *Ghostbusters* reboot, the new *Star Wars* spin-off *Rogue One*, or sports anime - shows catering for people who aren't straight men are always criticised for being rubbish.

Every day, we're surrounded by the objectification of women, whether it's on the Internet, on TV, or in music. Women are used in adverts about everything; reduced to

Sports anime is the new craze within the genre. But some aren't happy about this development...

objects as they hold beer bottles in bikinis as if they were a drink holder with boobs. Similarly, in anime, we often see female characters with no personality other than being timid, or a tomboy. And they pretty much always have huge boobs, just to keep the (straight male) audiences interested. In 'moe' anime, we see young girls, almost prepubescent, being fetishised.

When watching a show like *Fairy Tail*, I have to ignore the gratuitous sexualisation of all the female characters, including the young girls. And then, suddenly, along comes this series called *Free! Iwatobi Swim Club*. It's a show about passionate swimmers who are all close friends; they all have great characters, and are about to graduate high school - so they're of legal age - at least in the UK - unlike the girls we see being sexualised in moe. These well-rounded characters also happen to be super-attractive. It's something that we basically never see. And some people still suggest that shows like this are a 'disgrace to all anime'.

Let's read a YouTube comment replying to someone who argued there was nothing wrong with anime like *Free!*:

"So you don't have a problem with lolis [underage girls] in swimsuits? That said, don't play into the 'w-well what about the female audience?!' Women are catered to... on a daily basis. It's why you can hit men but can't hit women. Aside from the fact that women are physically inferior, of course."

Ignoring the irrelevant, sexist comments

Comment by Anonymous

08:58 16/07/2014 #! Neutral (0)



The increase in literally gay anime is increasing lately. So many this season just to please the gays. I counted 9 airing that include outright gays, extremely gay looking, cross dressing. The gay activists are making their way to change fanservice as we know it. Pretty soon, half the anime airing charts will be for gays.

Here comes the "oh what about females liking..." NO. Cut the crap gay boy.

Reply to Anonymous

Self-explanatory.

about female inferiority, there is a point to bring up here. Is it OK to sexualise and objectify men? Can we enjoy something like *Free!* but still criticise 'lolis' and moe?

Well, in the words of Tumblr user 'mantearsflowingfree', "*Why can't I tell the difference between a show that reduces women to mewling sex kittens with the goal of men getting off on their humiliation and objectification and with that being literally the entire plot, and a show that features men who are shirtless because they are swimming?!*" Or we can put it this way: anime girl's boobs jiggle, in every anime. Male anime characters never have jiggling bulges; sounds horrifying, doesn't it? Well, so are the jiggling boobs! There's a

difference between this female fan service and the sexist stuff we see all the time with anime girls.

In fact, it's very hard to objectify men. Not because women are 'easier to sexualise', as one of my exes once told me. It's because men have a natural position of power in our culture. When one is objectified, they are not only looked at, but made inferior - reduced to something barely human. Women experience this all the time because in society, we're still considered inferior, suitable for objectification. But in a world where men are pretty much always on top, it's hard to argue that they're being objectified or victims of sexism when we sexualise them, because they're almost always going to be in a position of authority over women. That's how patriarchy works. Besides, the guys in *Free!* or any other sports anime aren't objectified. They're well-rounded, albeit attractive characters, with actual storylines, not just animated boobs.

When *Free!* first turned up, this was a huge issue; people were frightened that 'the gays' and this female fan-service would *destroy and infect all future anime*. Straight male viewers imagined an apocalyptic future where boys of a legal age would have romantic feelings for each other in an anime, a show aimed for an audience that's not them.

Terrifying.

Well, my response to those people is this - let us have this one thing, *please*, since most other anime are sexist towards women. Sports anime is not 'misandrist' and it's really not destroying the genre. Japan's got posters of these swimming boys and volleyball teams everywhere. They sell printed fan-fiction about them. They don't care - and nor should you.



Free! - Iwatobi Swim Club has caused some controversy for being 'too gay'.

THE EVOLUTION OF the X-MEN

PART TWO

by Andrew Pollard

So, you made it through the first part of our X-MEN comic book history unscathed. That's good to hear. Of course, part one saw us tag along with our favourite mutants up until the mid-1980s, just as the waters were starting to get a little murky and the overly convoluted stories were around the corner. That said, sit back and strap yourself in, for we're going to do our best to delve through the oft-confusing days of the late '80s and the majority of the '90s, then bring things right up to date as our comic book lookback at Xavier's team comes to a conclusion.

Changing the Game

We left things in Part One just after Professor X had been taken up into the stars by Lilandra in order to use Shi'ar technology to help rehabilitate. Xavier's final words before he temporarily left Earth were that he wanted Magneto to take charge of his School of Gifted Children. At the time, this was quite the shocking decision, with the Master of Magnetism slowly starting to see some major character development as new layers were added to him. Where the X-Men

themselves were concerned, longtime leader Cyclops had decided to retire from action in order to spend time with his wife Madelyne and their son Nathan. In his place, Storm had stepped up to become the leader of the team. That took us up until 1985 and to **Uncanny X-Men #201**.

By this point in time, the foundations of the X-Men world, not to mention the industry as a whole, had been rocked by **The Dark Phoenix Saga**. In that story arc, which was arguably the most shocking story in

comics history up to that point in time, Jean Grey, one of Xavier's original X-Men, ended up essentially committing suicide after becoming possessed by the power of the Phoenix Force. Having wiped out over five billion beings up in the cosmos, Jean chose to take her own life in order to stop the entire galaxy from being destroyed. Deep stuff, right? Impactful, right? Game-changing, right? Totally, *totally* something that will be in place forever and ever, right? Well, err, maybe not that last one.

You see, while the death of Jean Grey truly was a game-changer in how it saw such a major character killed off, it soon changed the comic book game once more when Jean was brought back from the grave. Well, technically she wasn't brought back from the grave, for it was revealed that she never actually died. Yes, what played out was one of the biggest examples of retconning (also known as a 'shitbag shuffle' here at Moonbase Alpha) in the history of comic books. The decision had been made to launch a new X-title called **X-Factor** in 1986, which was a book created in order to bring back the original five members of Charles Xavier's initial X-Men team. Only, y'know, Jean Grey was supposedly as dead as the demand for another Zack Snyder superhero movie. To get around this slightest of problems, however, writer Kurt Busiek devised a way of having Jean return as if nothing had happened. The grand plan was to have it revealed that Jean never actually was the Phoenix in the first place. Instead, the Phoenix had merely mirrored Jean's form and assumed her identity, with the real Jean Grey actually kept safe in a cocoon underneath Jamaica Bay. So the story goes, Busiek's idea was passed on to Roger Stern who then passed it on to John Byrne, who at the time was working on Marvel's **Fantastic Four** title. And so 1985's **Fantastic Four #286** casually dropped in the plot point of a cocooned Jean Grey, setting



up her full return the following year. This plot would also pop up in **Avengers #263** before **X-Factor #1** hit shelves in February '86. As the tagline on that premiere issue said, *'Because you demanded it – the dramatic return of the original X-Men'*.

Storywise, the creation of this new team was because Xavier's original team members weren't exactly smitten with the notion of working alongside Magneto's X-Men, and so they started up their own group. Consisting of Cyclops, Iceman, Beast, Angel, and Jean (even though that whole 'death' thing nearly saw Dazzler given the nod as the team's token female), the introduction of X-Factor didn't sit well with some readers for a couple of reasons. Firstly, there was the whole *"Oh, you invested in Jean Grey being dead? Oops, our bad – here she is!"*, but another major gripe was the portrayal of Cyclops during all of this. Scott had settled down with wife Madelyne in order to raise their son, Nathan. With Cyke usually being a whiter-than-white, do-the-right-thing moral compass type of hero, it then felt mightily off to see him walk out on Maddy and leave her literally holding the baby. Great example to be setting there, Scott! And so X-Factor was formed, with the five cunningly disguising themselves as mutant hunters for hire. They would get folks to come to them, all under the guise of the team being just regular people, with details of mutants that they wanted taking out. Using this information, the X-Factor group would locate these mutants and actually look to train them in how to use their gifts.

The next big event on the horizon for our favourite mutants was an arc dubbed **Mutant Massacre**. As suggested by the title, carnage was on the cards for our familiar faces. Running from October 1986 until December of that year, this event would feature the X-Men, X-Factor, New Mutants, and even appearances from Thor, Daredevil, and Power Pack. The threat that brought

these heroes together was that of the Marauders, a group who unleashed all-out war on mutantkind and, in particular, the sewer-dwelling Morlocks. Hundreds of Morlocks were slain at the hands of these Marauders, and it was only the arrival of the X-Men and X-Factor that put a temporary cease to the attack, although this came at a price. In the battle, X-Factor's Angel was actually crucified, and Colossus, Kitty Pryde, and Nightcrawler were all severely injured. This wouldn't be the end of the war, though, as Sabretooth, who was heading up so much of the assault on the Morlocks, would follow Wolverine back to the X-Mansion and destroy Cerebro. Luckily, Psylocke – the precog martial artist twin sister of Captain Britain, who had recently been introduced to the X-books – was on hand to temporarily take down Sabretooth, but the rogue would end up tumbling off a cliff with longtime rival Wolverine. In the aftermath of this arc, Angel would actually have to have his infected wings amputated, while Kitty Pryde and Nightcrawler's injuries were so bad that they had to head to Muir Island to get intense healing treatment. As for the tale itself, **Mutant Massacre** was so successful in terms of sales and response, it was decided that having such mutant crossovers should be a semi-regular occurrence.

Coming out of **Mutant Massacre**, not only had we been introduced to the cool and creepy-looking Mister Sinister as the mastermind behind the carnage, but the arc also lent itself to helping set up yet another X-title in the form of **Excalibur**. Debuting with 1987's **Excalibur Special Edition**, Excalibur was essentially a UK-based X-Men team from the minds of Chris Claremont and Alan Davis. Following their stay on Muir Island and in the belief that the X-Men were no more (this was a time before social media and mobile phones, kids), Kitty Pryde and Nightcrawler were founding members of the team with the 'from the future' and host of

the Phoenix Force (do these people ever learn?!). Rachel Summers, shapeshifting Meggan, dimension-jumping robot Widget, and Kitty's pet dragon known as Lockheed. Oh, and, of course, what would a UK-based team known as Excalibur be without Captain Britain? Brian Braddock, the sworn protector of Great Britain, was a key part of the team under his Captain Britain guise and was also the initial group's de facto leader. With all of the original team's major players now in place, from that moment on, the **Excalibur** title was to be a semi-regular staple of the Marvel Comics library going forward for the next twenty years.

Meanwhile, over in the main **Uncanny X-Men** title, Magneto had been leading a team consisting of Storm, Wolverine, Colossus, Rogue, and Havok before other new additions came in: alternative dimension TV star, Longshot; one-time disco singer who could now manipulate sound and energy, Dazzler; and the aforementioned Psylocke. But Magneto's leading of the X-Men didn't last all that long, for the death of newcomer Cypher would ultimately lead to the Master of Magnetism once again turning to evil. While this was a predictable turn, what was surprising at this time was that Chris Claremont actually decided to delve more into Magneto's backstory, making him a Holocaust survivor. The popularity of the books at the time also resulted in a couple of interesting miniseries as well, such as **The Fantastic Four vs. the X-Men** and **The X-Men vs. the Avengers**, not to mention the **Fall of the Mutants** arc, in which the X-Men died and were reborn before swiftly relocating to Australia, hence why the Excalibur crew thought the team had bitten the bullet.

The Shadow of Apocalypse

By this point in the game, the presence of a certain big bad was ominously looming over the X-Men and their world. Yep, we're talking



about Apocalypse. Having been glimpsed as early as 1986, and then subsequently revealed to have been a part of certain story arcs from way before then (again, shitbag shuffle is the phrase that comes to mind), it was **Fall of the Mutants** which saw Apocalypse and his modern take on the Four Horsemen start to play a slightly more prominent role, with him taking the now wingless Angel under his, err, wing, adorning him with some impressive metal wings and dubbing him Archangel.

As Apocalypse and the threat he possessed would simmer in the background of a lot of stories, his moment in the spotlight were still a few years away. Someone who was very much front and centre in the fallout of **Fall of the Mutants**, though, was Madelyne Pryor. The jilted wife of Scott Summers, not to mention the mother of Cyke's child, was revealed in the **Inferno** story to actually have been a clone of Jean Grey all along. But that wasn't the end of the matter, for Maddie then became the unhinged Goblin Queen. Getting herself involved with a group of no-good demons, it took the combined might of the X-Men and X-Factor to take down Madelyne's new persona. What was even more interesting here was that it was the first time that a lot of our heroes had laid eyes on the others for a fair while, with X-Factor believing the X-Men to have died, whilst the X-Men themselves were totally unaware that Jean Grey was back in the land of the living and a part of the X-Factor group. So, all happy endings and big hugs, right? Not entirely, for it was around this time that Longshot and Dazzler were written out of the standard

X-stories due to readers struggling to take to these relative newbies.

As the decade drew to a close, the cusp of 1990 saw **Uncanny X-Men** become a twice-monthly publication as

the popularity of the X-Men, still under the creative guidance of Chris Claremont, continued to soar. This increase in issues also allowed Claremont to delve into deeper stories that could involve a whole host of different mutants due to the twice-monthly format halving the wait between each issue and keeping attention spans and focus up. With the X-Men now made up of Storm, Wolverine, Psylocke, Banshee, and new additions in the form of Forge, Jubilee, and loveable rogue Gambit, the team would see this particular period of their history come to a head in **The Muir Island Saga**, an arc that had them tackling the nefarious and uber-powerful Shadow King.

At this point, it was now 1990 and a young chap by the name of Jim Lee took over art duties on **Uncanny** from Marc Silvestri. Lee would go on to become arguably the greatest artist of his generation and one of the very best of all time, and it was here that he really came into the eye of the comic book masses. With Lee on board, the growing X-Men world was soon to grow even further. 1991 saw Charles Xavier's long awaited return to Earth, as part of the aforementioned **Muir Island Saga**, but it was at this point that there was a little bit of a shake-up where the X-Men titles were concerned. Rob Liefeld came in and flipped **The New Mutants** into the newly-dubbed **X-Force** title, a book that focused on the Cable-led team of more mercenary-type mutants. Cable, of course, would be revealed to be the future son of Cyclops and Madelyne Pryor. Yep, little Nathan was all grown up... and with a shiny eye, a metal arm, and the ability of telekinesis. Elsewhere, the original members of the X-Men decided to bail on the whole X-Factor notion, instead returning to their roots and once again becoming fully-fledged X-Men. That's not to say that X-Factor was a dead entity though, for Polaris and Havok headed up

a new government-tied version of that particular group.

Where the main course themselves, Xavier's X-Men, were concerned, their roster and popularity had gotten to such a point that another title was added to the X-books. To run alongside **Uncanny X-Men** came a new title simply called **X-Men**. This **X-Men** book was handed to Chris Claremont and Jim Lee, with the title concentrating on what was dubbed the 'blue team' of X-Men, namely Cyclops, Wolverine, Beast, Psylocke, Gambit, and Rogue. The longstanding **Uncanny X-Men** was overseen by Lee and Whilce Portacio, with this book centred on the 'gold team' of Jean Grey, Storm, Iceman, Colossus, Archangel, and time-travelling badass Bishop. Such was the hype and fanfare over anything X-Men at this point that **X-Men #1** still remains the highest selling comic book of all time to this very day. Similarly, **X-Force #1** was also a monster hit upon its release. Simply put, people wanted as much of the X-Men and their universe as they could get their hands on!

Of course, no matter how successful things seem, there's always the chance that a bump in the road may be just around the corner. And that was the case here, for Chris Claremont would end his longstanding association with the X-Men after only three issues of the new **X-Men** book. The problem stemmed from Claremont butting heads with the Marvel higher-ups, plus some issues in his working relationship with Jim Lee. And it would be only a matter of months later that Lee himself left Marvel along with Rob Liefeld, Marc Silvestri and Whilce Portacio in order to set up their own comic book company, known as Image Comics. Still, though, the popularity of the X-Men remained unaffected, helped at the time by the hugely popular **X-Men: The Animated Series** that began to air in 1992. Where **Uncanny X-Men** was concerned, Scott Lobdell was brought in as a writer along

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TELL
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with artist Joe Madureira, whilst **X-Men** saw Fabian Nicieza on writing duties and Andy Kubert on art. Madureira's influence, in particular, immediately started to shine through, with him having previously made a name for himself thanks to his manga-esque style raising interest in the Japanese comics of the day, something that would eventually be used to brilliant effect where Wolverine was concerned.

Despite a change of the guard where the creative teams were concerned, certain staples of the X-Men books remained, most notably the huge 'event' arcs. Although some of these were starting to feel like nothing more than overplayed, overhyped marketing campaigns and PR stunts at this point in the game. Some of these stories *did* have some major consequences, such as 1992's **X-Cutioner's Song** focusing on Cable clone Stryfe torturing Cyclops and Jean Grey, whilst also framing Cable for the attempted assassination of Professor X, and then 1993's **Fatal Attractions** arc seeing Magneto return to the forefront in a big way by brutally ripping out the Adamantium from Wolverine's body, forcing Xavier to wipe the mind of his longtime BFF-cum-nemesis. This was a Magneto who was cheered on by a new set of followers called the Acolytes; a group that also included the recently-miffed Colossus, who'd seen his family killed.

All of this was all well and good, and there'd even be *another* brief spinoff series dubbed **Generation X**, but things would soon come crashing to a head in 1995. Remember how we talked about Apocalypse lurking in the shadows? Well, it was time for him to step into the light.

Apocalypse Now

Having spent years either in the background or proving a non-major threat to the X-Men, 1995 saw Apocalypse show just why he's now revered as one of the most powerful villains in the Marvel Comics world. In a

story initially dubbed **Legion Quest**, David Haller, the son of Professor Xavier, decided to go back in time to kill Magneto and put an end to the problems that the Master of Magnetism had caused David's bald-headed pops. What actually happened, though, was that the unstable David would accidentally kill his old man after the ever-heroic Charles would step in and literally take a fateful bullet for Magneto. As a result of this, the whole history of the X-Men world, even the Marvel world as a whole, was changed and fell into a four-month project dubbed **Age of Apocalypse**. This was a hugely ballsy move from Marvel, with them extending the effect of Xavier's death at an early age through to all of their titles. Of course, they still produced alternative, regular timeline sort of stories for all of these titles, but there were also exclusive **Age of Apocalypse** books for each and every Marvel title in order to show the full reach of a vastly different world following the death of Professor X. In Charles' place, it was actually Magneto who put together and led the X-Men, with the team having to stop the threat of Apocalypse. It was explained that the extra time it took Magneto to put together his group of mutants was just enough to allow Apocalypse to rise to omnipotent power and rule the planet in the mould of a God. The key to taking Apocalypse down, though, was Bishop. Being a time-traveller from the future himself, it was revealed that he still had full knowledge of the world how it *should* be; how it would be if Xavier wasn't killed and if Apocalypse didn't become the master and ruler of a dystopian world. What was even more intriguing for readers was that it was never particularly explained that **Age of Apocalypse** was a short-term thing, with the big debate of the day being how long this would all last for. And given that there were alternative 'standard timeline' books still available, it also gave readers a great chance to read two varying tales of



same characters set in different worlds.

The next big arc following **Age of Apocalypse** was 1996's **Onslaught**, a two-month tale that saw Professor X lose the plot. Unable to control his vast powers, he has a breakdown that creates the evil personality known as Onslaught. Seemingly killing both the Fantastic Four and the Avengers, Xavier is eventually locked up in prison for his crazed actions. This would partly lead to 1997's **Operation: Zero Tolerance** arc which saw the ever-reliable US government give an anti-mutant army complete freedom to hunt down and kill any and all mutants that they saw fit. And this was before George W. Bush even got into power! The rest of the decade, with some of the more elaborate, contrived and convoluted plots starting to come to an



end, would play out relatively smoothly for the X-Men. Well, we say smoothly, but there'd still be some great and memorable moments, such as the relationship between Gambit and Rogue, Jean Grey deciding to go by the name Phoenix again (yeah, because that'll work out well...), Iceman becoming a far more powerful character, Sabretooth nearly killing any X-Men he could get his hands on, Wolverine mutating into an even more pissed-off, feral beast, and the massive reveal that it was actually Gambit who put together the Marauders team for Mister Sinister during the **Mutant Massacre** story. Additionally, by the time the '90s came to a close there were solo titles for the likes of Deadpool (you might have heard of him), Cable, Bishop, and Gambit, although the **X-Factor** and **Excalibur** titles were temporarily brought to a close as the 2000s beckoned.

Even though a new decade was upon us, Apocalypse was still rearing his head and causing chaos for our favourite mutants. Starting in late 1999 and running until February 2000 was an arc dubbed **The Twelve**, which saw Apocalypse bring together the twelve most powerful mutants as he looked to harness their collective powers for his own gain. Luckily in amongst the likes of Professor X, Phoenix, Magneto, and Polaris was Cyclops, for it would be Cyke who'd sacrifice himself for the greater good in order to save all mankind. Good ol' Cyclops, ever the hero... well, apart from when he's shacking up with clones of his dead Mrs before then leaving said clone holding his baby.

Despite the 2000s being a huge time for the X-Men where the big screen was concerned, in the funny books it was a little bit of a different matter. Sure, the X-titles were still selling and doing okay numbers, but the huge boom of the 1990s was no more. In fact, even bringing Chris Claremont back in to the fold to work on both **Uncanny**

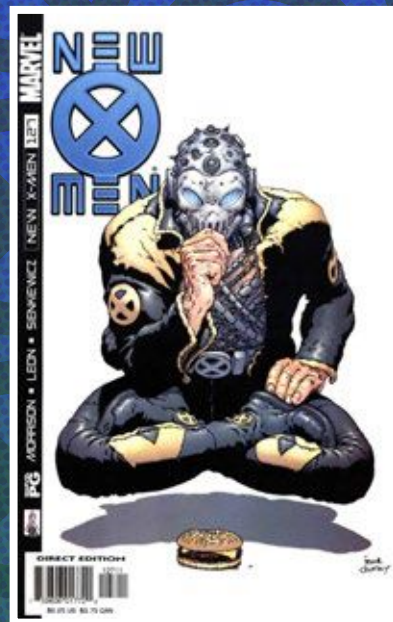
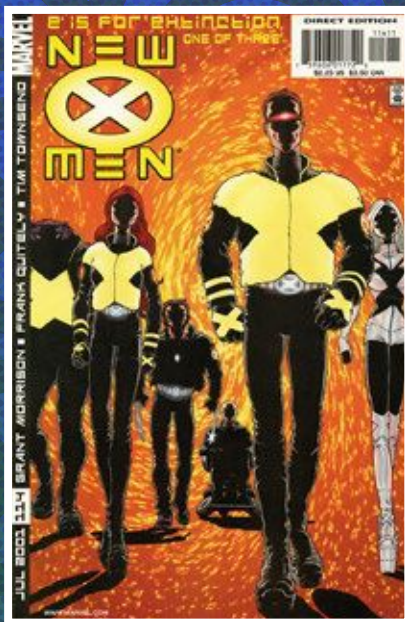
X-Men and **X-Men** in early 2000 couldn't shake the slump. By this point, it seemed as if longtime readers had maybe started to have their fill of the X-Men and their often head-scratching stories of alternative timelines, interdimensional escapades, time-travelling, and of death usually meaning absolutely zero. And so, for the first time in a long time, the X-Men books were starting to struggle a little. Claremont was soon removed from the main two X-Men titles and instead placed on the new **X-Treme X-Men** title that featured a so-so at best line-up of Storm, Gambit, Rogue, Bishop, Psylocke, Sage and Thunderbird. It was also at this time that the **Mutant X**, **Generation X**, **Gambit**, **Bishop**, and **X-Man** titles were all completely canned, and **X-Force** was given a makeover and renamed **X-Statix**. The fear was that the slowing interest in the X-Men books was down to an oversaturation of mutant-centric titles, and that was certainly a valid point.

Rebirth

With the X-Men book changed to **New X-Men** in 2001, in came Grant Morrison to give Marvel's mutants a kick up the arse. Never one to pussyfoot around, Morrison went balls deep from the get-go with a story called **E is for Extinction**. Slowly immersing himself in the X-world, Morrison used this tale to introduce a new villain by the name of Cassandra Nova, later revealed to be Professor X's sister. At Nova's behest, Sentinels would swarm on the island of Genosha and kill a whopping 16 million mutants! Yes, that Grant Morrison, always taking things slowly. During this time, Colossus would also sacrifice himself in order to stop the Legacy Virus, and Professor X would actually go public with the fact that he was a mutant, using this as the perfect opportunity to open the doors to his school for any and all mutants who sought refuge. Additionally, Morrison would move to tone down the X-Men's classic outfits, instead

installing a dress code that was similar to what was being seen in Bryan Singer's **X-Men** and **X-2** at that point. He'd also bring the Hellfire Club's Emma Frost in as one of the X-Men, with her having a slightly odd psychic affair with the returned Cyclops. Cyke would once more be with Jean Grey, but Jean herself also found the will they/won't they aspect of her relationship with Wolverine played up during Morrison's run. Elsewhere, **Ultimate X-Men** was launched with Mark Millar at the helm and **Uncanny X-Men** brought in Chuck Austen for an opinion-splitting run on the title. Reverting back to the formula used a few years prior, **New X-Men** and **Uncanny X-Men** began focusing on separate rosters of X-Men; **New X-Men** had Cyclops, Jean Grey, Emma Frost, Wolverine, and a heavily mutated Beast; **Uncanny X-Men** concentrated on the Archangel-led team of Nightcrawler, Chamber, Northstar, Stacy X, Husk, and - randomly - Juggernaut, with Havok, Jubilee, and Polaris soon brought in to the team. Although many gushed over Morrison's **New X-Men** work, Austen's **Uncanny** didn't fare so well, with the romance between Archangel and the teenage Husk a big sticking point for many longtime X-fans.

It was during this time that several solo miniseries were again ushered in for the likes of Rogue, Nightcrawler, Gambit, Mystique, and Emma Frost, but it was in Morrison's **New X-Men** that the majority of intrigue lay, for the writer had introduced a new character by the name of Xorn. This newbie was introduced relatively early in Morrison's run, with him deemed an incredibly powerful mutant who was being listed for sale by dodgy Chinese officials. With Xorn at an all-time low and contemplating suicide, the strange newcomer is saved by the X-Men and invited into their ranks by Cyclops. Following much intrigue and a stretched-out story, it would eventually be revealed that Xorn was actually Magneto, who had been



presumed dead during the loss of 16 million mutant lives on Genosha. If this wasn't enough, Magneto was now at his most maniacal, focusing on straight-up genocide. So intent on unleashing his wrath on the world, Magneto is crudely and clinically brought to a stop by Wolverine, who shockingly beheaded the X-Men's longtime rogue. And yet again during all of this, Jean Grey would make the ever-wise move of bonding with the Phoenix Force and being another familiar face who would once again end up dead. Do these mutants ever learn?!

When Grant Morrison departed **New X-Men** in 2004, this was also around the time that the poorly received **X-Treme X-Men** was cancelled and Chris Claremont returned to the familiar ground of **Uncanny X-Men**. It's likely worth noting that this was the time that **New X-Men** underwent another name change and reverted back to simply **X-Men**. Regardless of what the books were called, the focus of the action now lay on a team that was given certain government leeway; a move that marked them as similar to the Avengers. Additionally, a third X-Men-centric title was launched when Joss Whedon was handed **Astonishing X-Men**. Already loved amongst the geek community for his work on **Buffy the Vampire Slayer**, Whedon was welcomed with open arms. And it was with the introduction of this third X-title that the decision was made to revert all X-Men back to their more traditional, familiar outfits rather than the moody, broody dark leather getups that mirrored the X-Men movies of the day. This back-to-basics look was received well by fans, especially when paired with Whedon's writing and the crisp art of John Cassaday on. This all felt refreshing and much needed in the aftermath of a decade or more of some overly-complicated and hard-to-follow antics; Whedon's stories often kept things simple and straightforward, instead of focusing on

intricate and intriguing character arcs and relationships. Oh, and he brought back Colossus from the dead, something which Chris Claremont also did to Psylocke over in **Uncanny X-Men**. What followed was some fantastic, easy to read X-Men stories that just quite simply *made sense* – well, apart from Magneto joining the reformed Excalibur team after it was revealed that Xorn was merely an imposter Magneto.

Regardless of the whole Xorn conundrum, all was about to get shook up for the X-Men and the Marvel world in 2005 when the **House of M** arc, written by Brian Michael Bendis, swept across a whole host of Marvel Comics' titles. This saw Scarlet Witch, who by this point had long been established as Magneto's daughter, have a complete and utter breakdown as she tries to alter reality itself, in order to bring back her lost children. Similar to **Age of Apocalypse** in 1995, **House of M** actually took over the standard Marvel timeline for a few months. After Scarlet Witch learns that she'd been duped by brother Quicksilver, she uses all of her power to scale back the mutant population of the planet. With the words "*No more mutants*", the total population of mutants is reduced to 198 – as the majority of pre-existing mutants, including Professor X and Magneto, lose their powers. Of course, like **Age of Apocalypse** once more, this was only a temporary measure and things would eventually return to 'normal' after this whole event was deemed to have taken place in an alternative world (convenient, no?).

In the years following **House of M**, there'd be some decent stories such as **Deadly Genesis**, **Second Coming**, **Endangered Species**, and **Necrosha**, but none of these really seemed to hit the heights of the classic X-Men tales of yesteryear. And in the greater Marvel landscape, Xavier's mutants were kept well away from Mark Millar's **Civil War** in 2006,

meaning that X-fans were craving for something big from their beloved mutants. Fear not, though, for 2012 would eventually bring another monumental X-tale with the **Avengers vs. X-Men** story. That particular arc saw Hope Summers, the first mutant born in the aftermath of **House of M**, battling with the Phoenix Force (if in doubt, return to the age-old Phoenix story formula, right?) as it looks to take hold of her. The Cyclops-led X-Men are determined to help protect Hope, while the ominous presence of the Phoenix means that the Avengers are on the scene and willing to do whatever is necessary to stop the Phoenix from causing absolute carnage. During this time, the Phoenix would actually end up taking over Cyclops and forcing him to kill Professor X. Once Hope finally gets control of the force, she manages to eradicate it for good (yeah, right). Unfortunately for the X-Men, though, 2014's **AXIS** storyline would see the no-good Red Skull manage to get control of Xavier's abilities in order to exploit the rift between the Avengers and the X-Men, with the supposedly combined forces of these two teams once again splintered into separate factions.

So, that should pretty much bring you up to speed with everything of note when it comes to the X-Men's comic book history. Sure, it's pretty confusing and painful to think about at times – hell, we wince and reach for a beer at the mere thought of mid-'90s X-Men tales – but at least it's never dull when the X-Men are around. Now let's see if the same can be said about Bryan Singer's **X-Men: Apocalypse**.

**X-MEN:
APOCALYPSE**
is in cinemas
now.



CAN REBIRTH SAVE DC COMICS?



By Ryan Pollard

As there is about to be another upheaval in the DC COMICS' universe, **STARBURST** looks at what we can expect and why it's happening...

What the hell is DC Rebirth exactly? That's the question that every DC Comics fan has been asking since its announcement, and according to Dan DiDio, Geoff Johns, and Jim Lee, it's not a total reboot of the DC Universe like the New 52, but more a way of restoring it to a form much like that of the past universe prior to the *Flashpoint* story arc, while still incorporating some New 52 elements. In other words, it's a way of appeasing the hardcore fans that've been incredibly critical since the start of the New 52. For those uninitiated with DC Comics for the past five years, the New 52 was launched back in 2011 and was meant to be a clean slate, resetting and rebooting everything ever since both *Final Crisis* and *Flashpoint*. Storylines were rewritten, the entire continuity was destroyed, a lot of classic characters were de-aged and had their personalities altered, whilst others were written out of existence completely. Even a lot of the heroes and villains had their classic origin stories erased and crappy new ones replacing them as a means of keeping everything young and fresh, with particularly noticeable ones including Joker, Tim Drake and Mr Freeze. They essentially made the characters weaker

as a result; take New 52 Justice League for example: since their new start, they've barely won a single battle. They scraped by with Darkseid when he invaded the Earth, they struggled during the *Throne of Atlantis* against Aquaman's brother, Ocean Master, and were even beaten and humiliated by the Crime Syndicate. They have terrible teamwork, mostly consisting of emo-arrogant bullies who just rushed into battle head-on without any sensible form of strategy and were just weak. Plus, they were bad role models, which has nothing to do with them winning or not, or maybe that's just proving a point about how much that universe sucked. Bizarre new changes were also made during this run and universally, those decisions received a huge backlash, including Dick Grayson's Nightwing identity being exposed and forced into becoming a spy for Spyral, Joker apparently being this immortal clown that has plagued Gotham for centuries, Superman having new solar flare powers one minute and becoming powerless the next, Lois Lane revealing his dual identity to the world, and Jim Gordon becoming the new Batman.

The New 52, as a whole, didn't really communicate well with fans and as a

result, sales slowly declined and many book series were cancelled. With DC Rebirth, DiDio and co. have promised that things will change and that long-time fans will be won back; that's a bold statement there, so we shall see. What they are going for with Rebirth is combining both the past bronze/modern age universe with that of the New 52, almost in the same way that DC changed in the mid-'90s during *Zero Hour*. Many writers and artists from both the past and New 52 universes will be returning for Rebirth to helm many of DC's popular characters, and many of them are firm fan favourites, such as Peter Tomasi, Dan Jurgens, Greg Rucka and Bryan Hitch. According to Geoff Johns, many characters from the past universe will be coming into the fold in Rebirth with some replacing their New 52 counterparts, particularly Superman. That's right, New 52 Superman may be gone, but he's replaced by everyone's favourite Man of Steel from the Pre-52 universe. Clark's story will be continuing on from both *Convergence* and *Superman: Lois and Clark*, with him and Lois having a son together and somehow ending up in the New 52 universe. His son, Jonathan Samuel Kent, will have superpowers, become friends with Batman's son, Damian





Wayne/Robin, and together, they will be starring in the forthcoming series, *Super Sons*. Lex Luthor is going to be getting Superman-like powers and will start donning a Superman-styled armoured suit, becoming more of Superman's dark equal, and classic Doomsday will return to mess with Superman's family. Who knows what else DC has got planned for the New 52 version of Superman, but frankly, who cares? Because of the popularity of her own show on CBS, Supergirl will be having her own series and it will have her face her own father, Zor-El, who has now become the new Cyborg-Superman; and he has a plan of his own to entice his daughter to return to Krypton for his own needs. Because of the commercial success of *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, the Trinity (Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman) are going to be getting their own series, as well as still appearing with the Justice League.

As far as Batman's world is concerned, former CIA expert and DC veteran Tom King will be taking over from Scott Snyder to helm the Batman title, whilst Snyder will be creating his own exclusive *All-Star Batman* series, which will hopefully be a major improvement over Frank Miller's

back in 2005. *Detective Comics* will also return with both Batman and Batwoman becoming teachers to their new crime-fighting team consisting of Tim Drake/Red Robin, Stephanie Brown/Spoiler, Cassandra Cain, and Clayface. Dick Grayson will become Nightwing again, sporting the classic black and blue. He'll be getting his own book series that will deal with him trying to be a better hero than Batman and having to face a new adversary that'll be exclusive to that series. Not only that, but Nightwing will be reunited with the original Teen Titans in a new series called *Titans*, whilst a different Teen Titans team will also co-exist and be led by Damian. Batgirl will be operating solo, as well as teaming with Black Canary and Huntress for the *Birds of Prey* series, and it's apparent that DC will be incorporating elements of Barbara Gordon's past life as Oracle. Terry McGinnis will also return as *Batman Beyond*, so if you didn't like Tim Drake's run, then get ready to be excited. Plus, Red Hood will be back with the Outlaws, except this time, his new partners in crime will consist of both Artemis and Bizarro, as a result of Starfire joining Damian's Teen Titans and Roy Harper partnering with Dick's

original Titans. However, in a dramatic controversial move, DC is apparently going to reveal the Joker's true identity, which will no doubt upset some loyal purist fans.

Wonder Woman's history in both the past and New 52 universes have been convoluted to say the least, but with Rebirth, DC is attempting to fully clarify her history and tell a clear and precise origin story with the forthcoming storylines, *Wonder Woman: Year One* and *Wonder Woman: The Lies*. Green Arrow will be meeting up with Black Canary with a possible romantic connection blossoming on the horizon, and The Flash (still Barry Allen) will be running into the speed force storm, which will result in the birth of new speedsters. Some will be on the side of good, but some will turn to the dark side, including the new big bad, GodsPEED. As far as the Green Lanterns are concerned, both new rookies on the block, Simon Baz and Jessica Cruz, will be joining the Justice League, whilst Hal Jordan will be quitting the League in order to work with the Green Lantern Corps once again. In a bold and controversial move, a lot of Blue, Red, White, and Yellow Lantern



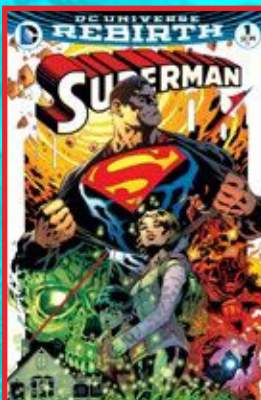


members are going to become Green again. Classic Green Lantern legends Guy Gardner, Kyle Rayner, and John Stewart are all going to be part of the Corps once more under Hal's command; this will all be found in the new series, *Hal Jordan & The Green Lantern Corps*. Both Blue Beetles, Ted Kord and Jaime Reyes, will be teaming up together, and Harley Quinn and Deathstroke will each be having their own series. Quinn will also be part of the new Suicide Squad team with Deadshot, Killer Croc, Katana, Captain Boomerang and some new additions that are yet to be announced, almost mirroring the team in the forthcoming movie.

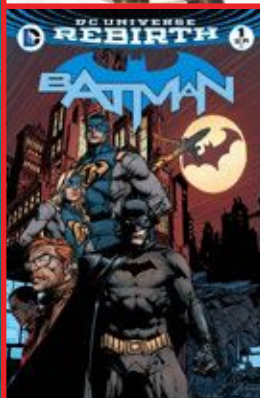
So, it all sounds very promising with DC apparently listening to the fans for once and giving them back the classic characters they want to see, but will it revitalise DC Comics and bring about the return to the glory years, or will it just be used as a sales gimmick in order to try and hook older fans? Guess we'll find out when DC Rebirth launches in May.



The 80-page one shot *DC UNIVERSE: REBIRTH SPECIAL #1* will hit stores on May 25th.



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Gothic

f a n t a s y

by Ed Fortune

As **BIG FINISH** continue their adaptation of the classic American series, we take a look at the history and impact of the essential Gothic soap opera **DARK SHADOWS...**

Many properties in genre and Telefantasy are often compared to soap operas. *Game of Thrones* has been frequently described as a soap with blood and dragons, *The X-Men* is famous for its over-the-top relationship drama and so on. But in the vast halls of genre goodness, only one show holds the honour of actually starting out as a genuine soap: *Dark Shadows*.

The American series originally aired weekdays on the ABC television network. Though it launched in June 28th, 1966, it wasn't until 1967 that the vampires started to show up. Like many American shows, it focused on the trials and tribulations of a wealthy family; in this case, the Collins of Collinsport, Maine. Its formula of soap-style melodrama mixed in with a Gothic sensibility has led to its cult following, with fans still getting their fix of scenery-chewing paranormal romance thanks to audio dramas produced by Big Finish.

During its short five-year run, there were 1,225 episodes made of the classic series. It was low-budget and high drama, with the tone set to as melodramatic and as Gothic as the

producers could manage. Plotlines involved witchcraft, time-travel, alternate realities and possession. Characters included ghosts, werewolves, re-animated corpses and, of course, various types of occult dabblers.

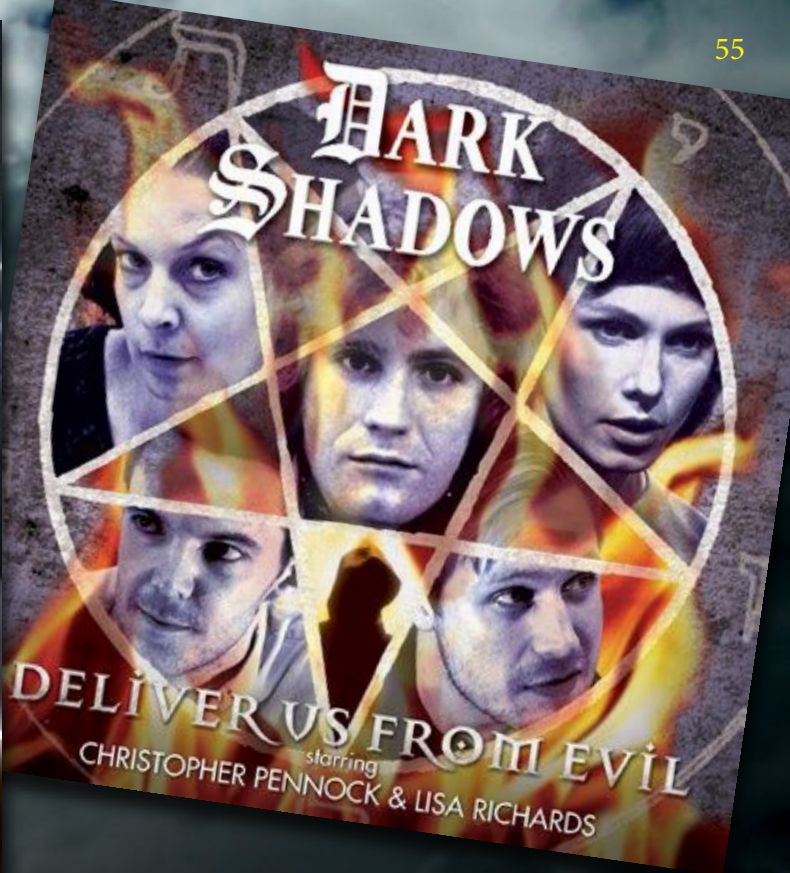
Many of the plotlines centre on the vampire Barnabas. Though the first year of the show featured supernatural and creepy family conspiracy style elements, once Barnabas is released from his coffin, he becomes pretty much the main character. Other characters attempt to cure him of his vampirism, get bitten or seduced by him, or even get sent back in time to witness his transformation into one of the undead.

The original run of the show ceased mostly due to changes in American advertising rules, which meant less revenue for the networks. This, combined with a sub-par Lovecraftian-style follow-up to a wildly popular storyline sounded the death knell for the show; although ABC did its best to wrap-up the loose ends toward the climax.

Luckily for *Dark Shadows* fans, recordings of every episode bar one survived. The show has had the devil's own luck, surviving various purges whilst

THE LATE JONATHAN FRID AS
BARNABAS COLLINS





THE BIG FINISH DARK SHADOWS CAST

in storage, narrowly avoiding a fate similar to early *Doctor Who* episodes. The series enjoyed some re-runs in the mid-seventies, but its real revival happened in the early '90s through to the noughties. The TV channel that now calls itself Syfy showed much of the series as part of its regular programming, making it enormously popular with Goths and general fans alike.

The show's longevity was also helped along by the shortly-lived 1992 show, *Dark Shadow's Revival*. Best described as a 'greatest hits' of the original series, it crammed a lot of Barnabas storylines and plenty of witchcraft into twelve lengthy episodes. It's a decent way to introduce fans into the series, and certainly a more superior route to *Dark Shadows'* weirdness than showing them the 2012 movie, directed by Tim

Burton and starring Johnny Depp as Barnabas and Helena Bonham Carter as Dr. Julia Hoffman, the family's live-in psychiatrist. Though it's fun in a high-camp Goth sort of way, it's more a generic Depp/Burton/Bonham Carter movie than it is a take on the original show, leaning slightly more to farce-type movies than it really needs to.

The current incarnation of *Dark Shadows* that's getting the most love from fans and those new to the series is the Big Finish audios. These tales are a continuation of the original TV series, with Big Finish acquired the license for the original show back in 2004. Whereas much of the action in the original series take place in the late '70s, the audios move things forward slightly to the next decade, giving the new stories some much needed breathing space.

The audios have taken a comprehensive approach to the show, using original cast members throughout. The series kicked off with occasional werewolf and all-round focus of bad news Quentin Collins returning to the town of Collinsport in the drama *House of Despair*, a haunted house tale, and continue onwards and upwards in that vein. Not only is it a pleasure to hear the original cast again, they all seem to relish their roles throughout. Most stories standalone extremely well, but each also stack on top of each other. Like any good soap opera, one can dive in at any point, but you're rewarded for loyal listening by being drip fed some of dark and dirty secrets of the town in a gradual manner.

We also recommend grabbing the Dramatic Readings, which expand on the original show's storylines. It even makes the highly unpopular *Leviathan* storyline good, thanks to enthusiastic acting and clever rewriting.

Dark Shadows' continuity is long and involved, much like any soap, but one of the joys of the new Big Finish audios is that they've kept the soap opera principles intact. This makes it effortless to jump with almost any show and immerse oneself in world of Gothic drama and things that go bump in the night. ✨

Find out more about the audio series at bigfinish.com/hubs/v/dark-shadows. BIG FINISH will be celebrating the DARK SHADOWS 50th Anniversary in June with a special release: BLOOD & FIRE.

PUCKER-UP!

BY BENJAMIN KAY

A brilliant example of Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird's unusual approach to characters is Casey Jones, the neurotic, sports-equipment-wielding vigilante. We're about to see **ARROW** star **STEPHEN AMELL** don the hockey mask in **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: OUT OF THE SHADOWS**. **STARBURST** presents a little history of the character...

REAL NAME:
ARNOLD BERNID
'CASEY' JONES

FIRST APPEARANCE:
RAPHAEL - **TEENAGE
MUTANT NINJA TURTLE**
(#1 OF A FOUR PART
MINI-SERIES) IN 1985.



When Jones was young, his father's auto-mechanic shop was attacked by a local gang who killed his dad and took his mother and sister hostage. Doing his best to stop the assault, Jones was beaten senseless by the gang's leader.

Casey Jones has featured in the comics, films, cartoons and video games of the franchise, spawning several different back stories. He was portrayed in the live-action movies of the early nineties by Elias Koteas. It was a respectable performance and interpretation, coining Michelangelo's notable epithet of the character: 'Wayne Gretzky on steroids'.



Throughout his history, Jones has an on-again off-again romantic relationship with April O'Neil – one of the turtles' greatest allies.



TURTLE-Y AWESOME!

Jones's first encounter with a Ninja Turtle involves Raphael, who shares a similar violent loner streak. Raphael stops Jones from killing several petty thugs. Meeting Jones helps Raphael realise his own code of conduct and ability to control his rage. After arguing about the ins and outs of crime-fighting ethics and battering one another to a pulp, the two join forces to fend off more bad guys. Raphael shares the closest bond of any of the turtles with Jones.

Casey Jones's personality is a mixed bag of aggression and neuroticism, brought about by his earlier tragedy. He develops an alliance with the turtles, but always stays on the fringe of their operation, doing things in his own crazy way.



All grown up, Jones works as a bouncer among other odd jobs. His hobbies are working out and watching television. Realising that New York is overrun with scumbags and gangbangers, Jones amasses an arsenal of sports equipment and hits the streets.

With the imminent release of **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: OUT OF THE SHADOWS** (in cinemas May 30th, cert: TBC) we're giving five lucky readers the opportunity to win one of these totally bodacious TMNT merch bundles!

Simply head over to the **STARBURST** website and enter our competition!

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TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Michelangelo, Donatello, Leonardo, and Raphael return to theaters this summer to battle bigger, badder villains, alongside April O'Neil (Megan Fox), Vern Fenwick (Will Arnett), and a newcomer: the hockey-masked vigilante Casey Jones (Stephen Amell). After supervillain Shredder escapes custody, he joins forces with mad scientist Baxter Stockman (Tyler Perry) and two dimwitted henchmen, Bebop (Gary Anthony Williams) and Rocksteady (WWE Superstar Stephen "Sheamus" Farrelly), to unleash a diabolical plan to take over the world. As the Turtles prepare to take on Shredder and his new crew, they find themselves facing an even greater evil with similar intentions: the notorious Krang.

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HORROR Obscura

This month, the miraculous Martin Unsworth uncovers another classic horror film ripe for rediscovery.



CULT of the WITCH HOUSE



In the waning years of the Swinging Sixties, horror was finding different avenues to explore; films were becoming more explicit with the depiction of sex, violence, and - quite often - occult practices. Tigon British Film Productions, a company formed by infamous exploitation producer Tony Tenser as a rival to Hammer Films and Amicus, had begun making small inroads with a brace of films, including two classics directed by Michael Reeves, *The Sorcerers* (1967) and *Witchfinder General* (1968). Reeves sadly passed away, aged 25, shortly after the release of the latter, but already Tigon had gained a reputation for making different, bold, films, and attracting some top name talent that made the low budget productions appear much more heavyweight. This tradition continued with the 1968 production, *The Curse of the Crimson Altar*.

Acting legend Boris Karloff, whose career started in silent films, before becoming a worldwide superstar (aged 44, and certainly not an overnight success) with Universal Pictures' *Frankenstein* (1931), had already appeared in *The Sorcerers* and returned to Tigon once again despite ill health and respiratory problems. Joining him was Christopher Lee, also

a familiar face in horror films due to his work with Hammer and Amicus. Although not quite as well known, another two genre icons would also make appearances in the movie: Michael Gough and Barbara Steele.

Gough had built a solid reputation with work on TV and movies, but really found an audience with low budget horror and thrillers such as *Horrors of the Black Museum* (1959), *Konga* (1961), *Black Zoo* (1963), and *They Came from Beyond Space* (1967). Although he only plays a minor role in this film, his presence is certainly felt, and, as always, he leaves an indelible mark on the proceedings. Steele, on the other hand, was perhaps lesser known at the time, although the Cheshire-born actor had made an impact in Italian films such as Mario Bava's *The Mask of Satan* (*La maschera del demonio*, 1960) - a film so shocking that the UK censors refused to grant a certificate until 1968, under the title *Black Sunday*, not long before the release of *Crimson Altar* - and Riccardo Freda's *The Terror of Dr Hichcock* (*L'orribile segreto del Dr. Hichcock*, 1962). Here, she plays Lavinia Morley, a persecuted witch, who haunts the dreams of our hero.

Robert Manning (Mark Eden, who would become a familiar face on British TV several decades later when he played evil Alan Bradley in *Coronation Street*) is an antique dealer who is concerned for his brother Peter, who seems to have disappeared not long after sending him some interesting items. He heads to his last known whereabouts, Craxton Lodge, but the owner, J. D. Morley (Lee), informs him that Peter has never been there. However, being a decent sort, he invites Robert to stay; even though the locals are preparing for their annual memorial of the burning of the witch Morley - an ancestor of the lord of the house. Now, since Robert has already ingratiated himself with Morley's daughter, Eve (Virginia Wetherell), who in the midst of a swinging party with her friends - complete with body painting, fighting girls, passed out blokes, and toffs spraying champers over each other in the most homoerotic manner possible, only to have a bored-looking lady pour the remains over her boobs - he snaps up the offer to stay. This party isn't anything sinister or kinky, though. It's more akin to an art school freak out than a satanic rite.

Eve shows Robert to his bedroom and he's clearly impressed with the surroundings,



"It's a bit like one of those old houses in horror films", he quips. "I expect Boris Karloff is going to pop up at any moment." A cheeky in-joke of the type rarely done at the time.

Now, as we've already been privy to the fact that Peter (Denys Peak) has been involved somehow with a bizarre and erotic Black Mass ceremony involving half-naked men, a woman with nipple pasties, a whip, and a strange-coloured Barbara Steele, then it's clear there's more to the memorial than meets the eye. Robert is unnerved during the night by a dream of the ritual, too. But it was so vivid, almost real; it couldn't have actually happened, could it? Well, yes, of course it did. He also uncovers that his brother did in fact stay there, but under the alias that he used so as not to arouse suspicion among the wealthy whose antiques he wished to buy at knock-down prices.

The academic who lives next door comes to pay a visit, and Robert is invited to meet him. Professor March (Karloff) is an amiable chap, even bringing along some of his rarest vintage brandy; something that's lost on Robert. He is an expert on the occult and clearly knows more about what's going on than he lets on. He

does invite Robert to view his extensive collection of instruments of torture. Not an offer you get every day, we're sure.

As the celebrations for the memorial get underway, Robert and Eve start to get closer - he's a fast worker is our Bob, making a play for the poor girl almost straight away - and they head out to watch the ceremonial bonfire and some rather reckless use of fireworks (Karloff almost gets one in the face, which surely wasn't in the script).

When Robert has another 'dream' of a ritual, in which he's being made to sign a witch's confession, he sees his brother, who has been made a slave of the Priestess Lavinia. He even ends up sleepwalking, and is just saved from walking into a lake by a friendly neighbourhood policeman. He takes Robert back to the house and he goes knocking on Eve's bedroom door, clearly a little distressed. Now, since Robert has already shown his 'interest', shall we say (essentially throwing himself at Eve), it might be a little naïve for her to answer her bedroom door to a potential sex pest in a short nightie. And even more so to let him lie in her single bed with him. Still, this was a different age, clearly. And lo

and behold, the four-poster bed is soon a-rocking. When he finally makes it back to his own room, he comes across a secret door - one that leads to the room in his 'dreams'.

Robert goes to see the Professor and learns that he is, in fact, the last descendant of the witch's chief accuser - and she won't rest until she is avenged. We won't spoil the rest of the plot, but there are twists and turns aplenty and it is certainly a bigger success as a movie than director Vernon Sewell's previous Tigon picture, *The Blood Beast Terror* (1968), which is quite a struggle to re-watch these days (and star Peter Cushing wasn't particularly enamoured with it at the time).

Curse of the Crimson Altar is loosely based on the H. P. Lovecraft story *The Dreams in the Witch House*, and was retitled *The Crimson Cult* for its 1970 release in the US. The story is almost a predecessor to *The Wicker Man* with its basis of a missing person and rituals, but has much more going for it than a lot of people give it credit for. Not least the stellar cast and vivid colour palette.

Although all the elements of the film work perfectly, it could have been much



different. Karloff was originally cast as the villain, playing to type, but his ill health gave producers fears that he may not be able to finish filming. Before production began, the aging actor was dropped from the role and the search was on for an equally recognisable name. Attempts to sign Vincent Price would have meant delaying the start of the project, so Christopher Lee was contracted. It was just a week before the cameras were due to roll that Tigon changed their minds on Karloff, rather callously figuring that they'd have paid him whether he lived or died anyway. A smaller part was hastily written by associate producer Gerry Levy.

His new role in place, all the scenes involving Boris were shot first. It was by no means an easy shoot for the legend, however. Frail, ill, and confined to a wheelchair, Karloff's scenes were filmed

during several cold December nights. No matter how sad the image of the frail and actor is, he gave 100 percent, and is as memorable and engaging as he ever was. Even opposite Christopher Lee (whom he'd worked with on *Corridors of Blood* in 1958), the star shone brightly, delivering his lines with his trademark beautiful lisping voice. A brilliant gag has his character raving about a vintage brandy, only for Mark Eden's Robert Manning to down it as if it were water, leaving the academic scoffing at his young guest. Clearly a very proud man right to the end, Karloff actually insisted on walking in one scene (towards the end of the film), something that left him in intense pain and breathless. He was adamant that the audience didn't only see him confined to his chair. The freezing shoot did get the better of him, however, and he was hospitalised for a while with a bad cold.

He recovered, and returned to Hollywood, where he fulfilled his obligations of appearing in four low budget Mexican horror films. He passed away in February 1969, a mere two months after *Curse of the Crimson Altar*'s UK release. The four Mexican movies were all released several years after the legend's death, and are a sorry way to remember the great man. As a more fitting swan song, Peter Bogdanovich's superb *Targets* (1968) and Sewell's *Crimson Altar* are better ways to remember the career of an actor who brought chills, thrills, and many smiles to the faces of his adoring public.

✦
CURSE OF THE CRIMSON ALTAR is screening on HORROR CHANNEL on May 21st. Sky 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138.



by Martin Unsworth

Adam Starks

One of the hardest styles of movies for low budget directors to conquer is the sword and sorcery fantasy genre. ADAM STARKS, a young but enthusiastic newcomer, has accomplished just that, though, with his film THE JOURNEY TO ARESMORE...



STARBURST: How did you get into filmmaking?

Adam Starks: It started when I was about eight years old. I would create stop motion animations on a home video camera just to amuse myself and show my friends. My uncle noticed I had an interest in cameras, so he got me a mini disc camcorder for my birthday that allowed me to edit them on a computer, which at the time, not many people could do. By the time I was a teenager, I grew out of the hobby and started seeing it as 'silly' and 'childish', as did my friends. It wasn't until I got to the age of 22 and graduated university that I seriously thought about what I would like to do in my life and what makes me happy; then I remembered how much I used to enjoy making films and so I made the decision there and then to make a feature-length movie.

The Journey to Aresmore is an amazingly ambitious project for your first film; can you tell us what made you take the plunge with this?

When I started, I was definitely naïve about what goes into making a film; I took the plunge because I didn't know exactly what I was in for. If I knew then what I know now, I would never have attempted it and would have done a much simpler and shorter first film. I'm glad we made the movie though, it was a lot of fun and I learned a lot and I would encourage anyone else to do the same.

How did you raise the budget, and how much was that?

I spent a couple of days putting together a concept video to accompany the script and must have gone to every UK production company and film funding scheme to get the movie financed. All of them declined, which is completely understandable as it would have been a massive risk to fund a British movie with a first time director/writer. I found myself at the point that makes a lot of aspiring filmmakers give up, but I decided I was going to make this movie whether I got funding or not, I wasn't going to let film financiers decide if I got to make this! So I funded the movie myself; I couldn't say the exact amount it cost, as it was filmed over such a long period, there was no set budget, I would

just keep filming and paying as we went along. Fortunately, it has paid off getting into the thousands in film sales, just a few weeks after distributing it.

How did you cope with both acting and directing?

I never really thought about it as two separate things that I had to do, I just thought of it as 'making a movie'. The original plan was to have someone else play Peter and I was going to spend my time behind the camera. When it came to the first day of shooting, we didn't have anyone to play Peter so as a last resort, I decided to play him. I don't think it added any stress or anything, as I knew I could rely on myself to turn up and be on time, although it was a bit time consuming to do my lines in front of the camera whilst trying to get the shots I wanted.

How long did the film take to shoot? And how long did the edit take?

In total, it took two and a half years (and

that was still rushing it!). Joshua Copeland and I were both working full time jobs at the time and we would only have about a four-hour window each month where we could both be available to shoot the movie. We would have to rush and we had to get it right in one take, which meant that most of the lines were improvised as we couldn't rehearse the scene. We did eventually manage to get time to go to some really nice locations, but they were few and far between.

We imagine the amount of effects involved meant a lot of planning went in to the shoot - what were the biggest challenges?

The biggest challenge was maintaining continuity, as any effects shots were made months before the time we shot that scene. I decided to do it that way to save time in editing but the problem was that exterior locations would change massively, depending on the season. Another big challenge was trying to show facial expressions through the

prosthetics on the characters; in addition to them being very uncomfortable, every expression had to be exaggerated to the maximum as the silicone didn't move with the face all that easy.

What were your influences when you were writing and planning the story?

My biggest influences were the fantasy movies from the '80s and early '90s such as *Willow*, *Hook*, *The NeverEnding Story*, *The Goonies*, *Legend*, etc... Those films are a major part of my childhood and made me want to give this movie a sort of retro feel. I wanted it to be set in the modern day, but feel like it could have been made 20 years ago.

Where were the locations you used, and did you manage to get permission to use them all or were they filmed 'guerrilla style'?

We went all over the UK to find the exact locations needed for the film. A lot of the exterior locations were shot in

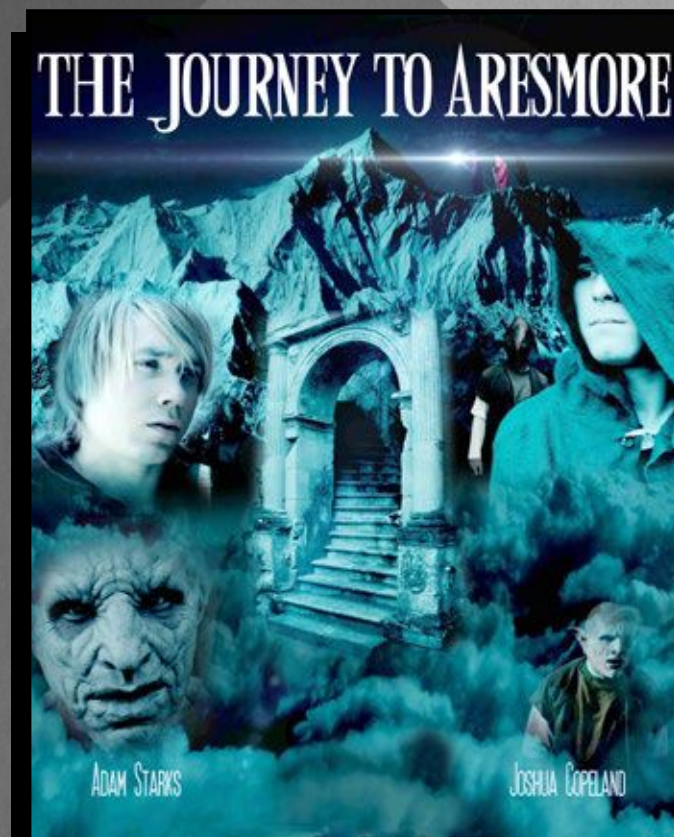
NIGHTMARE CODE



Snowdonia in Wales, The Peak District, and The South Downs National Park. Most interior locations were filmed near where we live in Hampshire; we are very fortunate to live near a lot of historical places and ancient villages that fit perfectly into the movie; I didn't realise there was so many castles in the UK until I started looking. We got permission for most of the locations, I was surprised at how supportive people were when I explained I was making a movie. I expected most of them to say no but they were fine with it.

Do you have any interesting stories from the shoot you'd like to share?

Well, in one of our scenes, we went to the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire. We turned up to an area of the forest with a very magical unique feel to it; we thought we were alone for miles. When we arrived, we noticed a gate that was left open and assumed it was a way into the forest, which it was. When we got a





few hundred meters past the gate and saw that something wasn't quite right, we could hear crowds of people and in the distance we noticed what looked like a film crew with trailers and lights, etc. Some people came running over explaining that we shouldn't be there and we can't go any further. We asked 'why not?' to which they responded with two different answers, the first being that it was a children's party (which seemed very unlikely), the second was that they were trimming the trees and it was too dangerous to go any further. So we stopped where we were and did our filming around 500 meters back from where the people were (we had to try hard to not get them in the shot). We got back to our accommodation later that night only to find out that the location was currently being used for *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, but sadly I didn't get to meet J. J. Abrams!

What's next for you?

Since releasing *The Journey to Aresmore*, I've been fortunate enough to be able to shoot my next movie called *The Criminal Network*, which is now in post-production and coming out some time this summer. I have also started pre-production on another movie called *The Beast of Bodmin Moor*, which we should be shooting later this year. ✦

THE JOURNEY TO ARESMORE is available to buy on DVD from thejourneytoaresmore.com.



REVIEW:

THE JOURNEY TO ARESMORE

**CERT: TBC / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: ADAM STARKS
/ STARRING: JOSHUA COPELAND, ADAM STARKS /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

It's been a few years since Peter Jackson took us on a fantastical journey with his adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, and the less successful but still visually spectacular *Hobbit* movies. However, there is, indeed, still a lot of interest in this style of fantasy, as fledgling filmmaker Adam Starks proves with his ambitious first feature.

Peter (Starks) and Jack (Copeland) are both preparing for their exams - the latter less so than the former, so Peter offers to help Jack study in the woods during an unusually balmy December day. While settling down and waiting for his friend, a bolt lights up the tree Peter is resting against and he awakes startled to find himself - and Jack - in a parallel world. A land where creatures roam and swords and sorcery are the norm.

In order to get home, the pair must travel through the dangerous forests and past treacherous ruined castles, where they encounter - and fight - a host of hostile armies who want the pair dead.

Starks' film is incredibly brave - it's clearly a labour of love, with the director also producing, writing and playing (along with Copeland) all the parts. It's also very long - at over three hours, it rivals Jackson's films for endurance. As such, the film has an episodic feel at times, but there's always some action on the way before too long. With just the two actors, one would expect things to be rather lame, but thanks to some well thought-out and cleverly done editing, it looks like there are plenty more people involved.

The story itself is an interesting one, raising moral questions above the usual quest or destiny formulas; it does get very wordy, though, with whole sequences narrated in voice over and lots of dense mythology to absorb.

If there are flaws to pick up on, they are budgetary ones. The prosthetics for the creatures are little more than masks, lacking movement and fairly unrealistic, but they serve their purpose. The overuse of After Effects distracts at times, but once again this is forgivable for the budget and the fact it's practically a one-man show. A few day-for-night filter effects fall short, but generally, the post-production is actually of a high standard. There's nothing too distracting, however, and it certainly doesn't take anything away from the enjoyment of the film.

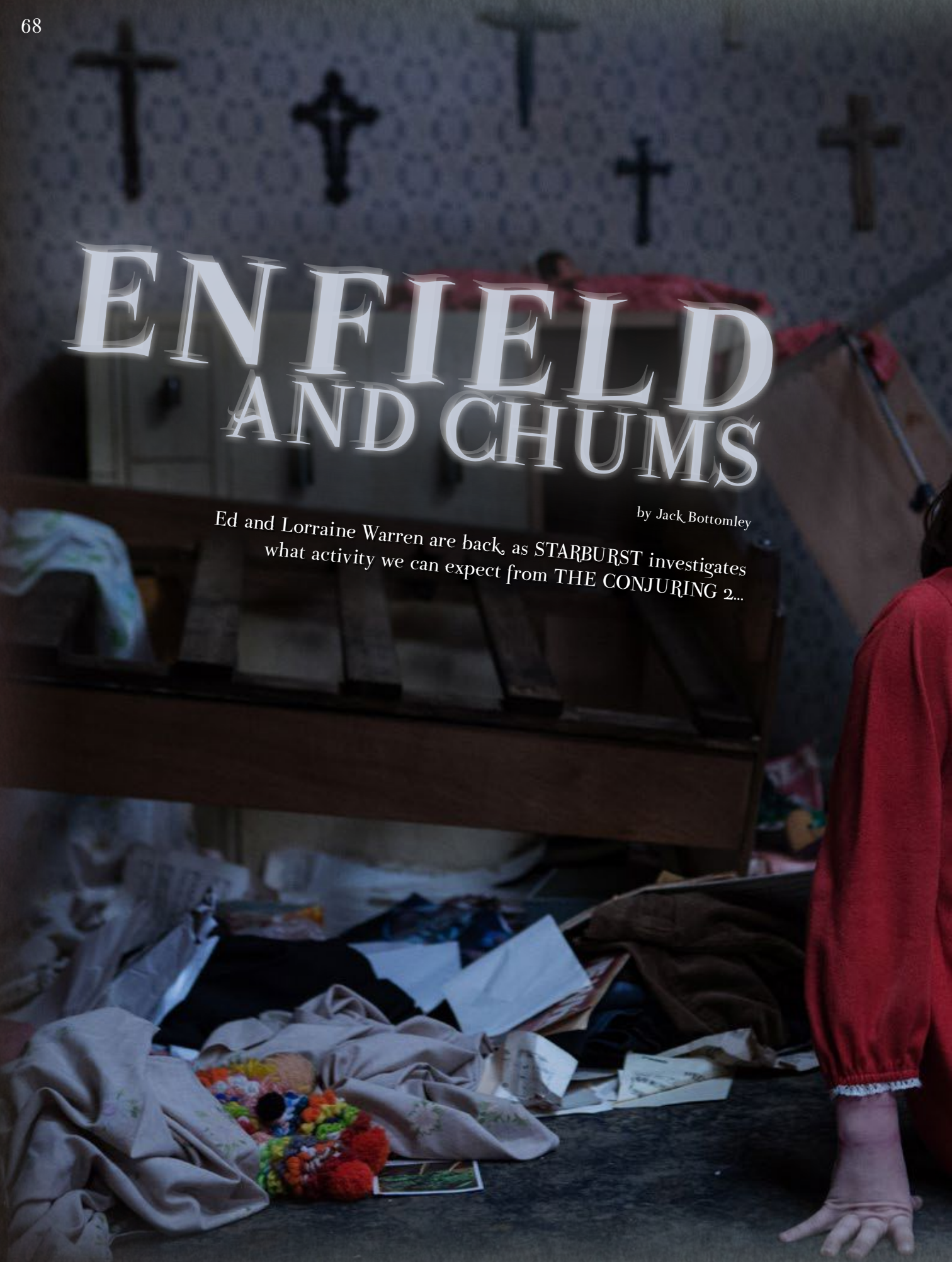
For such a young filmmaker, Starks has excelled with his début. It may not be the most lavish-looking or commercially appealing movie, but he certainly has the talent and skills to go places. And with a knowing editor, *The Journey to Aresmore* could be tidied up to a more agreeable and viewer-friendly length. As it stands, it's great fun for those with a flavour for fare such as *Hawk the Slayer* or *Willow*.



ENFIELD AND CHUMS

by Jack Bottomley

Ed and Lorraine Warren are back, as STARBURST investigates
what activity we can expect from THE CONJURING 2...



PATRICK WILSON ON TACKLING ONE OF THE MOST INFAMOUS PARANORMAL CASES IN UK HISTORY:

"We understand how much this means to the British paranormal community. So there is a sense of respect that we have for it. I mean, as far as it being scarier. It's funny, there's nobody better in this business than James Wan at making it scary, so I have no problem."



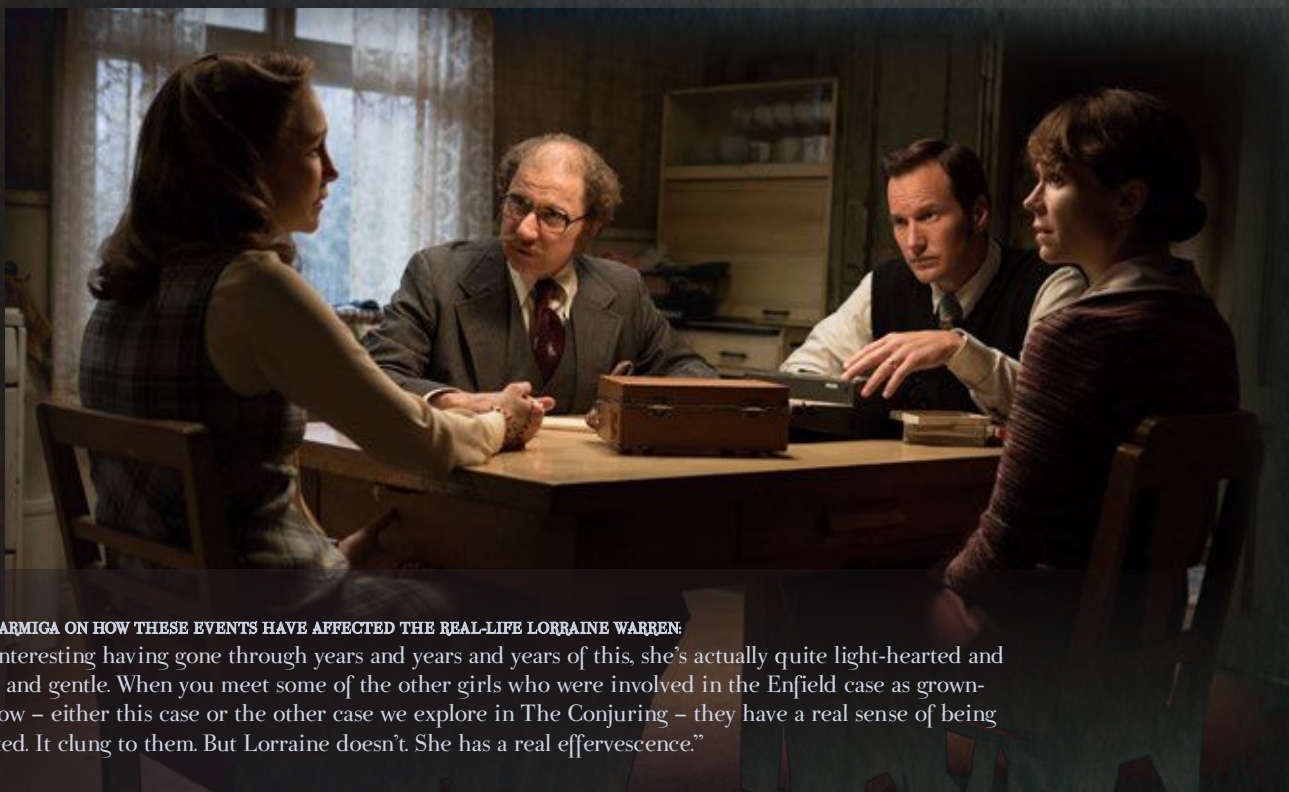
Ghost stories are older than cinema itself, so distinguishing the good from the bad can be a mighty task. From Elvira causing a stir for her still living husband in *Blithe Spirit* to ghouls being all in a day's work for Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, and Harold Ramis in *Ghostbusters* to 'Toby' ensnaring the affections of a young Kristi in *Paranormal Activity 3*, ghosts inside the cinema have taken numerous shapes, but they are never far from the big screen. However, when a paranormal tale is based on true events, or at least billed as such, there is no denying that it leaves you thinking just that little bit harder. And back in the late '70s, a particular haunting, which would become one of the most famous cases in England, hit the headlines and now makes up the basis for this sequel to the 2013 horror hit *The Conjuring*. So what can we expect from this return from Ed and Lorraine Warren?

For those who do not know, the Warrens were a real-life couple (Lorraine is still alive and well and met up with the makers of the films regularly to give her insights and experiences) that were demonologists, clairvoyants and paranormal investigators, and built up a history of many high profile and frightening cases. Inspired by these case studies was *The Conjuring*, a chiller directed by James Wan, hot off the back of his paranormal phenomenon *Insidious*. *The Conjuring* saw the Warrens investigate a case in Rhode Island in 1971, as the Perron family desperately reached out for help, in the face of a sinister presence terrorising their home. The film, despite occasionally drawing from the jump scare rulebook occasionally, proved a hit with audiences and critics because of its old-school approach of minimal special effects and genuine scares backed by good performances.

As Ed and Lorraine Warren, Patrick Wilson (*Insidious*, *The A-Team*, *Watchmen*) and Vera Farmiga (TV's

Bates Motel, *Source Code*, *The Departed*) were effective leads, lending these true-life figures a degree of humanity and weakness in the confrontation of such dangerous and unseen evil. *The Conjuring* was named the best horror of the year by many and with a worldwide box office haul of over \$318 million - nearly 14 times its budget - a sequel was a given. So, after the 2014 spin-off *Annabelle*, based on the actual possessed doll locked away in the Warrens' family home to this day (though that doll looks less threatening than the porcelain troublemaker they designed for the film) and used to terrify us in *The Conjuring*'s opening moments, we now have an official sequel in the shape of *The Conjuring 2* (formerly *The Conjuring 2: The Enfield Poltergeist*). Much like last time, and as alluded to earlier, the film is inspired by the Warrens' case studies, though in this instance, the case in question is arguably one of the most prolific in (British) history.





VERA FARMIGA ON HOW THESE EVENTS HAVE AFFECTED THE REAL-LIFE LORRAINE WARREN:

"It's interesting having gone through years and years and years of this, she's actually quite light-hearted and joyful and gentle. When you meet some of the other girls who were involved in the Enfield case as grown-ups now – either this case or the other case we explore in *The Conjuring* – they have a real sense of being haunted. It clung to them. But Lorraine doesn't. She has a real effervescence."

In August of 1977, the haunting of a council home in Brimsdown, Enfield North London, became mainstream media news, all the way up until 1979. The story saw single parent Peggy Hodgson reach out to the police for help when two of her four young children, Margaret and Janet, were apparently terrified by something unexplained. From knocking, demonic sounding voices and, most famously, the levitation of some of the children, the story has become an extremely well remembered one, which drew a lot of debate back then and has continued to do so over the years. Ed and Lorraine Warren were just some of the many investigators who entered the home to observe and report on the activity. However, it must be said, the story is not without controversy, with many, including magician Bob Couttie and skeptic Joe Nickell, stating that the hauntings were predominantly false and a product of the girls' imaginations. Indeed, the occasional

awkward interview with the children raised many a question. Nickell even suggested the infamous photo of Janet levitating in the air was just a photo of a gymnastic girl leaping from her bed. Bit of downer? You bet! But we have to address the reported story here.

However, no matter what you believe (Ed Warren certainly attested that demonic possession was involved), you cannot deny that there is a compelling story here ripe for the pickings. The crew were certainly taking no chances, as many strange on-set events occurred in the making of the last film. From James Wan's new pup staring at something in the room and something scratching Vera Farmiga's computer screen, to the screenwriters' chats with Lorraine Warren being inexplicably cut off by static and the hospitalisation of (the real-life eldest daughter of the family depicted in the last film) Andrea Perron after visiting the set, strange things were happening. This

all encouraged the crew of this sequel to call in a priest from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Santa Fe to bless the film's set... well, that's a confidence builder.

Interestingly enough, Sky Living's *The Enfield Haunting* last year covered the same story but as we edge towards this summer of movies, might we be being too rash to expect this sequel to live up to the surprisingly effective standards of the first? James Wan, David Leslie Johnson, and Carey and Chad Hayes' story is obviously based on this long remembered newspaper-hitting horror story but, in part, also draws influence, as the last film did, from one of the Warrens' most famous cases: the events that occurred to the Lutz family, events that form the basis for *The Amityville Horror*. So, with this in mind, we'd wager you can expect bodies to be thrown around bedrooms, families to be pushed to their mental brink, and frightening forces to make themselves



a bit of a pest once again because, lets face it, no paranormal investigation ever goes to plan in the movies!

Way back in October 2014, and despite the suggestion he would never helm another horror film, James Wan was confirmed to be returning to direct *The Conjuring 2*. In fact, the filmmaker would turn down a 'life altering' amount of dosh (to shoot 2017's *Fast 8*) to tell one more terrifying tale. Wan's return behind the camera certainly bodes well in a genre where many sequels are cursed by the disinterest of the original's cast and crew. Perhaps *The Conjuring 2* will prove an exception as, in addition to Wan's return and the return of the last film's two screenwriters, the film will once again be led by Wilson and Farmiga as the Warrens. Also returning is Sterling Jerins (*World War Z*, *No Escape*) as the Warrens' daughter Judy, editor Kirk M. Morri and, collaborating for a fourth time with Wan, is the film's composer Joseph Bishara, who scored the last film and appeared in a cameo as the Bathsheba Sherman.

However, new cast members include Frances O'Connor (TV's *The Missing*, *AI: Artificial Intelligence*), who will be playing Peggy Hodgson, while the main publicised victims of the hauntings, Janet and Margaret, will be portrayed by young talent Madison Wolfe (*Devil's Due*, *Trumbo*, *Joy*) and Lauren Esposito respectively. And making up the rest of the Hodgson children will be Patrick McAuley and Benjamin Haigh (Channel 4's *The People Next Door*) as Johnny and Billy. Also cast is Simon McBurney (TV's *Rev*, *Robin Hood*, *Mission Impossible - Rogue Nation*) as the real parapsychologist Maurice Grosse, who remained adamant that the events in the Hodgson house were of supernatural origin. And, perhaps most interestingly of all, the casting of Franka Potente (*The Bourne Series*, *Run Lola Run*) as Anita Gregory, another real-life figure who was highly skeptical of the haunting and went as far as label the girls as staging events for publicity. This is interesting, as it well suggests Wan's sequel could address the plausibility debate surrounding the film's source story, which could make for an even more promising and provocative narrative.

What we've seen so far does look a little exaggerated but then, many people were not expecting *The Conjuring* to excel as it did. The film was recently previewed at the Las Vegas CinemaCon and the feedback was very promising,

with audiences giving the film a strong ovation. Could lightning strike twice? *The Conjuring 2* certainly has a controversially captivating story inspiring it; with the same retro horror chills and strong performances, the potential is certainly there for this to be an entertaining sequel to one of the biggest horror hits of recent years. True, the same could have been said ahead of Wan's disappointing *Insidious: Chapter 2* (2013), but whereas that film suffered from a convoluted story, it seems that this adaptation of the notorious Enfield Poltergeist story has strong foundations to work off already. A lot of the production took place on set in Los Angeles but the shoot later moved on location to London. So, with onset spiritual precautions taken, it seems that the crew have really travelled to the heart of this story... let's hope nothing has followed them back home.

THE CONJURING 2 jump scares its way into UK Cinemas on June 17th.



JAMES WAN ON WHETHER THE CONJURING 2 WOULD INVOLVE SOME DARK HUMOUR LIKE INSIDIOUS 2 DID:

"Insidious is a bit more larger than life, so we can have a bit more fun with crazy Patrick Wilson going nuts. The Conjuring is a different beast in that the first film was very well respected and very grounded, so I wanted to make sure we still stay true to the things that people like about the first film, and one of the things is just how grounded the film was and that, because it's based on these real-life characters, I can't veer off and do something too wacky."

REVIEWS

THE LATEST BIG
SCREEN GENRE
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR

CERT: 12A / DIRECTORS: ANTHONY RUSSO, JOE RUSSO / SCREENPLAY: CHRISTOPHER MARKUS, STEPHEN MCFEELY / STARRING: CHRIS EVANS, ROBERT DOWNEY JR., SCARLETT JOHANSSON, SEBASTIAN STAN, ANTHONY MACKIE, DON CHEADLE, CHADWICK BOSEMAN, JEREMY RENNER, PAUL BETTANY, TOM HOLLAND, PAUL RUDD, DANIEL BRÜHL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Somewhere in the middle of the toxic, molten mess that was *Batman V Superman: Dawn of Justice*, released to almost universal derision a couple of months ago, was the potentially intriguing notion of superhero accountability; who's to blame when the death toll rises and the buildings start to fall and who's powerful enough to reign in this new breed of heroes and impose a form of governance upon people with extraordinary, terrifying abilities? *BvS* fudged the question horribly, of course, disintegrating into mindless fisticuffs between two rather boring men in capes who eventually (and metaphorically) decided to kiss and make up and become best friends forever when they discovered their mothers had the same name. Trust the mighty Marvel Cinematic Universe to run with broadly the same idea in *Captain America: Civil War*, the first title in a brave and bold third phase of feature films, and trust Marvel to, yet again, show their shabby rivals a clean pair of heels. By any standards, *Civil War* is an extraordinary film; richly populated, densely plotted and packed with nods and references to almost all those MCU films which have gone before, topped off with some barnstorming cameos, the odd surprise (no spoilers here!) and, when you least

expect it, some moments of genuine pathos and emotional heft. This is a project that, in many ways, is the pay-off to a run of films which began with *Iron Man* in 2008; that fans will be rewarded with a movie that revels in a fictional universe intricately and carefully nurtured ever since and it does it because it's earned it. The film knows that its audience will appreciate its kisses to the past

because, by and large, the audience has been with these movies each and every step of the way and is intimately familiar with this rich, colourful mythology.

It'd be easy to dismiss *Civil War* as *Avengers 2.5* but this is absolutely a *Captain America* movie through and through. Granted, it's a film about *The Avengers* and most of the team's familiar faces are present and correct, but Steve



STARBURST

Rogers/Captain America drives the film's narrative and powers its central conceit; his relationship with Tony Stark is right at the core of the film's beating heart. As the film begins, we're a year on from Age of Ultron and the Avengers – Cap, Falcon, Wanda (Scarlet Witch) and Natasha (Black Widow) – are in Nigeria knocking lumps out of a bunch of terrorists determined to get their hands on a deadly biological weapon. But during the battle there's more death and destruction, and the world's governments have finally had enough of superheroes wantonly hurtling around the world causing chaos and carnage wherever they go. In the wake of the events of Age of Ultron, they've come up with the Sokovia Accords, an impressively-chunky document which seeks to impose massive restrictions on the Avengers' activities, removing their independence and allowing them to be deployed strictly on the say-so of the Accords' governing body. Not unnaturally, this causes an immediate and massive schism within the ranks of the Avengers. Tony Stark, jaded and battle-weary, supports the new initiative, but Steve is adamant that the group should be allowed to go about its business unfettered and unrestricted. As some of the Avengers prepare to sign the Accord in Vienna and Steve has to deal with another very personal loss, a new atrocity results in further loss of life and it appears that The Winter Soldier, Cap's old wartime sparring partner Bucky Barnes, now a violent, reprogrammed killing machine, is responsible. Battle lines are inevitably drawn as Steve searches for Bucky before the others – including vengeful catsuit-clad newcomer Black Panther, the alter ego of T'Challa, leader of tiny South African nation Wakanda – can bring him to justice. Meanwhile the mysterious and manipulative Zemo (Brühl) is working to his own bitter – and entirely, splendidly unpredictable – agenda unbeknownst to the shattered Avengers. The World's Greatest Heroes are torn in half, and as they prepare for combat, new recruits are drafted in to swell their numbers; the Falcon calls upon his former one-off sparring partner Ant-Man and Tony Stark takes a trip to New York to have a quiet



word with a certain web-spinning teenager who's been making quite a name for himself in the crime-fighting business...

Make no mistake, this is an intricate, tightly-packed film and yet, unlike BvS, which ran to a similar two-hour-plus length, the pace never drags, the story never sags and the action, when it comes, is fantastically and endlessly exhilarating. The airfield clash between the two Avenger factions and their temporary new recruits is perhaps the purest, most glorious and prolonged comic strip superhero sequence yet committed to film and it's unrelentingly wonderful. We know what to expect as Cap, Iron Man, Black Widow, The Vision and the rest fly into action, but the lithe and imposing Black Panther, Rudd's Ant-Man and, especially, Tom Holland as Spider-Man bring a thrilling new dimension to the dynamic. Holland, a more boyish Peter Parker/Spider-Man than we've seen before, is virtually pitch perfect, capturing the spirit and essence of the character in his introductory sequence with Tony Stark and, in battle, trading quips and revelling in the joy of being superhuman in ways that his cinematic predecessors could never quite manage. It's the most

astonishing and pulsating sequence in a movie which subsequently has the guts and the guile to deliver a more intimate and heart-stopping finale as Captain America and Iron Man, faced now with the truth about a tragedy from Stark's own past, duke it out in one last slugfest in which, for a while, it looks as if there can really only be one victor.

Captain America: Civil War, in the final analysis, never puts a foot wrong. A smart, witty script gives everyone in the huge cast something to do – no-one feels shoehorned in, no-one feels short-changed – and the film works because of its tight, clever, constantly surprising storyline and, more fundamentally, because Marvel has taken the time to build and develop these characters and make them seem, underneath their armour and their elaborate costumes, like real people with real fears and foibles and emotions. Hardcore comic fans may quibble at liberties taken with the original Civil War storyline but this is a revisionist version designed for the Marvel Cinematic Universe, for the fans who have embraced these characters across the last decade. It's a magnificent action film, it's a triumphant character piece, it's big, brash, bursting with confidence and brio; it's Marvel firing on all cylinders just when, by rights, we might be expecting the law of diminishing returns to set in. Not a bit of it. Not only is this the best Marvel movie yet, it's also quite possibly the best superhero movie ever made. With the rather brilliant Russo Brothers who, after first Winter Soldier and now Civil War, have demonstrated that they have an instinctive understanding of what really makes superheroes tick in the 21st century, back on board to direct the upcoming Avengers: Infinity War two-parter, we're already counting down the days....

PAUL MOUNT



EXPECTED ++++++ 9

ACTUAL ++++++ 10



THE HUNTSMAN: WINTER'S WAR

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: CEDRIC NICOLAS-TROYAN / SCREENPLAY: CRAIG MAZIN, EVAN SPILIOTOPOULOS / STARRING: CHRIS HEMSWORTH, CHARLIZE THERON, JESSICA CHASTAIN, EMILY BLUNT, SAM CLAFLIN, NICK FROST, ROB BRYDON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

A long time ago, the cinematic realm was ruled by mighty works, until the evil studios stepped in and brought with them armies of reboots, remakes and sequels... Seriously though, while we are all up for an imaginatively thought-out reboot (Mad Max: Fury Road) or well crafted sequel (Star Wars: The Force Awakens), there are a lot of films today that simply do not need to be. To that point, you could argue that few people seemed to be clamouring for a follow-up to 2012's Snow White and the Huntsman, but with fairytale/fantasy live action makeovers all the rage at the moment (Maleficent, Cinderella et al.), we have just that. So as The Huntsman: Winter's War (Snow White's naffed off this time around) arrives at the gates of cinemas, has this follow-up nobody really asked for exceeded expectations?

This sequel first goes back before the events of the last film and tells the story of the wicked Queen Ravenna (Charlize Theron) and, more importantly, her sister Freya (Emily Blunt), whose ice conjuring powers are awoken after a betrayal by her lover costs her the life of her child. This leaves Freya cold to the idea of love and vengeful in ruling her own kingdom. In the process, she steals children and has them trained up as Huntsman loyal to her. One of these very huntsmen is Eric (Chris Hemsworth) who has a secret lover Sara (Jessica Chastain). But when the ice queen discovers their budding romance, she sees fit to shatter their love and kill them (she's no Elsa, that's for damn sure). However, years later, the story then picks up after the events of the last film, as a still alive (as we all knew) Eric is called upon by Snow White's forces to lead a defense against the ice queen Freya,

who is out to get hold of the sinister magic mirror used by her sister, that will grant her unstoppable power.

From Frozen to Brave to The Golden Compass to Game of Thrones, the influence of many fantasy and family works are felt in the screenplay to this cluttered sequel, which is in a frantic search to validate its own existence. It must be said that this sequel does actually improve upon its drab predecessor and the lack of Kristen Stewart's disinterested Snow White (who looked like she was doing a maths quiz as opposed to being in an adventure last time) is a blessing. This sequel is punchier, funnier and initially not a bad (if wholly by the books) yarn. Sadly, these elements of comic crunch (Rob Brydon's dwarf Gryff and Sheridan Smith's dwarfess Mrs. Bromwyn have a very funny - and a little swearsy - first meeting) do seem to fizzle out as the movie becomes a rehash of the original's style centred and empty action sequences.

The performances do salvage some quality, as Hemsworth is by far a more interesting protagonist than Stewart was and, as Huntsman Eric, is charming and funny. He strikes a decent chemistry with Chastain, who is well placed as an action heroine, though her wonky Scottish accent distracts throughout. Emily Blunt harnesses chilly energy as the ruthless Freya and, while massively underused (she is in the film at the beginning and end, basically), Charlize Theron once more is a baddie befitting a better movie. Sheridan Smith, Rob Brydon, Nick Frost and Alexandra Roach offer fine comic support as the four dwarf companions, too. Unfortunately, the film is once again let down by its downhill momentum,

which scuppers the efforts of the cast the longer it goes on.

There is, once again, some outstanding imagery, but once the mid-point is passed, the film basically runs out of steam, with its story becoming predictable and a near rework of parts of the first film. And the concluding twist is clearly visible from the early few moments of the movie, with the corresponding action sequence being all style no substance and the whole movie descending into a flashy but hollow spectacle, with a gushy story about love being unbreakable.

This film is not all bad, but it is a follow-up that really did not need to be made and wastes the efforts of a game cast on a screenplay that feels like an amalgamation of other better movies and TV shows. There are ideas here but the visuals eventually take credence over the story, as the film descends into a big budget Revlon advert. The real hero of the story becomes Colleen Atwood, whose costumes are brilliant, but the characters they are covering, are left stranded by a story that feels desperately searching for a point; when it cannot really find one, it just makes do with a CGI showcase and a Liam Neeson (if it isn't him, it sounds a bloody lot like it is) voice telling us about love. Sometimes a visual showcase can still be a treat; this is better than the last film but still feels wholly unnecessary.

JACK BOTTOMLEY

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★ 6

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★ 4



THESE FINAL HOURS

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: ZAK HILDITCH / STARRING: NATHAN PHILLIPS, ANGOURIE RICE, JESSICA DE GOUW, DAVID FIELD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Despite being finished back in 2013 (and even redone as a short last year), it's only now that Zak Hilditch's *These Final Hours* gets a UK cinema run, and it's about time. Hilditch's 'end of the world' effort is a movie that could well be a dark horse bet to be one of many people's favourite films of the year by the time 2016 comes to a close.

Plot-wise, as suggested by the title, the movie tells the tale of a world awaiting impending doom. As other countries have already begun to be wiped out after a meteor crashes into the North Atlantic, the action here takes place in Australia. We're introduced to James (Nathan Phillips) and his lover, Zoe (Jessica De Gouw), as it soon becomes clear that the two are at odds over just how exactly to spend their final 12 hours; Zoe wants to spend their last hours together, whilst James instead has plans to meet up with some friends and his girlfriend (yep, there's more than one lady in his life) in order to have the party to end all parties so that he doesn't feel the soon-to-be-here death that awaits all of mankind.

Within the opening moments of the film, we're firmly made aware that James is not a great guy. Whether it's womanising, drug taking, or simply his selfish, single-minded nature, the character is far from any sort of hero, but then again, this is a film that isn't necessarily about heroes. In fact, it's simply about ending your living days in the way that you see fit, with Hilditch exploring the differing reactions to the apocalypse. Some people choose to take their own life, some choose to commit crimes, others want to be with their loved ones, and some, like James and his friends, decide to just get fucked

up in one final gathering of true excess. For James, though, his plans get a tad derailed when he comes across Rose (Angourie Rice), a young girl searching for her father. And this is where the narrative of *These Final Hours* changes, with James presented with the dilemma of another day of being his old self or a chance at some form of redemption and of doing one final act of selflessness, opening up the chance to finally do the right thing and explore what really matters in life.

Whilst *These Final Hours* may fly under the radar of some, it's certainly worth hunting down, with Zak Hilditch marking himself out as a real talent in how he has crafted such a tense, atmospheric, engaging movie that feels dirty, visceral and gritty yet also meaningful, evocative, poignant and visually stunning as the beaten down world is often reflected in the sunlit landscape of what the end of the world really looks like. The Key to all of this, though, are the performances of Nathan Phillips and Angourie Rice. Their supporting cast are also worthy of note and are all pitch-perfect, but it's the film's leads who both shine equally

as bright. Phillips balances the turmoil of his situation expertly, with his turn here suggesting the 35-year-old actor could become a true breakout star if given the chance in a bigger scale picture. As for young Angourie Rice, rarely has a child put in such an impressive performance in recent memory.

Simply put, with *These Final Hours*, Zak Hilditch has created a low-budget effort that could, and should, very well be a highlight of the year.

ANDREW POLLARD

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★ 6

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★ 8



STARBURST

REVIEWS

THE LATEST HOME
VIDEO RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



GHOULIES (1984)

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: LUCA BERCOVICI / SCREENPLAY: LUCA BERCOVICI, JEFERY LEVY / STARRING: LISA PELIKAN, PETER LIAPIS, MICHAEL DES BARRES, JACK NANCE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's over 30 years since the fiendishly enjoyable Gremlins, one of the best-loved creature features of all time, was unleashed on the cinema-going public. As directed by Joe Dante, it took a fortune at the box office, spawning an ever-diminishing return of imitations and rip-offs. Dante himself hit the big time with his Jaws rip-off, Piranha, so fair dos.

Ghoulies was actually in production at the same time as Gremlins, but the money to complete the film only came from its backers once Gizmo and pals turned into a massive hit, with the consequence that this low budget horror comedy made an unexpected small fortune, even spawning several sequels. But with a new release on Blu-ray, is it actually any good all these years on?

When a Satanic ritual in which an occult leader tries to sacrifice his own son goes wrong, baby Jonathan is rescued by Wolfgang (Eraserhead's Jack Nance) and raised knowing nothing of his late father and his supernatural leanings. But when he inherits the very mansion this all happened in, and uncovers his late father's box of occult belongings, he gets more and more obsessed with demonic activity, until he not only summons the beastly little ghoulies of the title, but the corpse of Dad too... all of this on the night he throws his housewarming party! Can his girlfriend and sundry young stoned

and horny teen guests get through the night without getting grabbed by the ghoulies, and save their friend?

It wasn't until the director of Ghoulies, Luca Bercovici, first laid eyes on the puppets that would be his monsters a few weeks before the start of the shoot that he realised they'd never get away with the original intention of making this a full-on terror fest, so decided to inject the whole enterprise with some comedy. Good job too, as the best thing about the film is the sometimes intended, sometimes not, laughs. However, such changes so close to the shoot also mean that the film feels unbalanced, with tonal shifts in plot and performances. The cast do a decent job, some hamming it up gloriously (there's a massively camp fight scene between burly bearded Jack Nance and mincing corpse Michael Des Barres, which looks like a gay bear and drag queen brawl in a revue show gone wrong), whilst others take things more seriously. The script sticks to its central premise quite tightly but fails to provide the kind of filler content which would allow the plot and characters to feel real and, therefore, empathetic.

The creatures themselves are of the 'so bad it's good' variety, clearly hand puppet creations but nicely animated, with quirky design and enjoyable mischievousness. Lovely also to see the late Tamara De Treaux getting some on-screen time just

a few years after having worked on, or more accurately inside, E.T.

The film gathered much of its cult following via VHS sales in the mid '80s, but what was fun as a teen then doesn't necessarily make for great viewing now. There are reasons we still enjoy watching Gremlins, a quality script and great direction amongst other things, whereas Ghoulies only just avoids being bollocks.

ROBERT MARTIN

★★★★★★ 6





THE SIGN OF FOUR (1983)

DVD + BD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: DESMOND DAVIS / SCREENPLAY: CHARLES EDWARD POGUE / STARRING: IAN RICHARDSON, DAVID HEALY, THORLEY WALTERS, CHERIE LUNGI, RICHARD HEFFER, CLIVE MERRISON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In 1983, American TV producer Sy Weintraub teamed up with British producer Otto Plaschkes to produce a new series of lavish TV feature films based on the exploits of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's legendary Great Detective Sherlock Holmes. But just around the corner were Granada TV, whose Jeremy Brett-starring series was already in the planning stages (and which was to go on to deliver, for many, the definitive interpretation of the character) so Weintraub's plans ground to a halt with just two films – *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *The Sign of*

Four – ultimately made. With Holmes currently fashionable again thanks to Benedict Cumberbatch, Jonny Lee Miller and even Robert Downey Jr, *The Sign of Four* makes a timely reappearance on DVD to remind us of what could have been.

Starring Ian Richardson as Holmes, 1983's *The Sign of Four* is a brisk, no-nonsense adaptation of the second full-length Holmes novel. The story is one of the more complex in the Doyle canon, involving a secret cache of diamonds, a one-legged man, a boat chase along the Thames, a mysterious "small

man" and the first appearance of Mary Morstan, who eventually becomes betrothed to Dr Watson in Doyle's original stories (even though it is to be a short-lived union). Ian Richardson is a clipped, jaunty Holmes and all the tropes and clichés are present and correct, from the familiar 'deerstalker' image of the character to David Healy's slightly pompous Dr Watson (a portrayal popularised by Nigel Bruce in the Rathbone 1930s-40s film series and which only became less of a caricature in the Brett TV version). The film is filled with choking London smogs, hansom cabs and ragged urchins scurrying about in the employ of Holmes himself.

Production values are excellent with plenty of exterior sequences cleverly utilising then-derelict portions of the capital (especially around Butler's Wharf near Tower Bridge, now a popular and affluent residential area packed with trendy bars and cafés); even the river chase manages to conceal any sign of the bustling 1980s metropolis just a few hundred feet away. Deviations from the original text are inevitable, but they remain sympathetic to the labyrinthine plot which, in its first hour at least, is dialogue heavy and action-light. But there's time for some wit, too, especially in

a scene where Holmes and Watson journey back to Baker Street on a variety of rattling bicycles and carts. Pretty much all Holmes boxes are ticked – even "Elementary, my dear Watson!" is rolled out – with the inclusion of a witty sequence where Holmes disguises himself as a sozzled old sailor to procure information from a boatman's wife, bamboozling Watson in the process.

This version of *The Sign of Four* brings nothing new to Sherlock Holmes – as an American co-production the idea was probably to be as traditional and retro as possible – but Ian Richardson has an easy, affable charm and brings a passion and vigour to a role which Brett would redefine just a few months later in the Granada series. But this is an enjoyable, by-the-numbers romp which more than does the Great Detective justice and, in an era when doing Holmes 'straight' isn't on anyone's agenda, it's a reminder of just why Sherlock Holmes remains one of the most iconic and enduringly popular characters in British literature.

Extras: Commentary

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★★★ 7



PANDORICA

DVD + BD + VOD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: TOM PATON / STARRING: TOM PATON, JADE HOBBDAY, MARC ZAMMIT, ADAM BOND, LUKE D'SILVA, BENTLEY KALU, AMED HASHIMI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The future of low-budget filmmaking is alive and well, and to be frank, it took a dystopian-themed film to make us that optimistic. *Pandorica* received its world premiere at the recent SciFi Weekender and was

enthusiastically received by the packed audience.

The story itself is pretty simple. It is the far future. An unknown event called the great reset has forced people to return to a simpler way of life, and

society has devolved to a tribal existence. Among these tribes are the Varosha, and the plot concerns three candidates from the Varosha tribe who are set to undergo a generational trial to determine the new tribal leader. The trial takes place in a thick, dense forest with the current leader, Nos (Luke D'Silva) along to choose his successor.

The candidates are Eiren, Thade and Ades. Broadly speaking, Eiren (Jade Hobday) is a strong, fearless and capable female warrior, Thade (Adam Bond) is a gentler, more noble character reminiscent of *Game of Thrones'* Jon Snow, and Ades is the irredeemably sly bad guy, the hisssable villain that the audience love to hate, and is played to perfection in a standout performance by Marc Zammit.

The trials take an unexpected twist when another tribe appear in the forest, including Flinn (Laura Marie Howard) who carries with her a

mysterious box, the contents of which really affect the balance of power – hence a Pandora's box.

Writer/director Tom Paton has woven a twisted tale with some surprising plot twists and unexpected turns, ending up with a masterclass in quick and cost-efficient filmmaking, delivering a slick product that defies belief that the whole project was written, financed, filmed entirely on location, edited and is set for release, with the plot elements for a sequel in place – all on a budget that is actually less than that of the location catering for a Hollywood A-lister.

Paton's confident direction, very much in the style of early John Carpenter, makes him a genre name to watch out for if his debut feature is *this* good.

The dystopian future looks bright!

ROBIN PIERCE

★★★★★★★★★★ 10



THE NINTH CONFIGURATION (1980)

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: WILLIAM PETER BLATTY / STARRING: STACY KEACH, SCOTT WILSON, JASON MILLER, ED FLANDERS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

As enigmatic as its title, William Peter Blatty's 'The Ninth Configuration' confounded critics and an indifferent public when it was released in 1980. Now that the film is out on Blu-ray, can a quality upgrade make what's actually going on in the film any clearer?

The author of 'The Exorcist', Blatty has long been a man steeped in concerns of religion, faith and man's place in the universe. His phenomenal worldwide success at writing about the Devil and the corrupting

forces of evil was not, however, matched when he turned his attention to the other side of the ideological coin.

In a remote castle somewhere in California, a military institution for men suffering with mental health issues has some unorthodox ways of dealing with patients. Most of the men are facing traumas following the war in Vietnam, whilst one is a famed astronaut (Scott Wilson) who abandoned his trip to the moon, terrified at the thought of dying

alone. Into this literal madhouse, a new psychiatrist (Stacy Keach) joins the medical doctor (Ed Flanders) and various military personnel to try to get to the root of the patients' issues. But amidst situations like two of the inmates (a great double act from Jason Miller and horror stalwart Joe Spinell) mounting the works of Shakespeare for dogs, and various theological conversations about the possibility of God in a post-war world, not everything at the asylum is exactly as it seems.

Serving as author, screenwriter, actor and director for 'The Ninth Configuration', Blatty's strengths are also his weaknesses. The film is confusing, confounding, ridiculous and chaotic, as is reflected in the way it was made, with Blatty taking the entire crew to Budapest and creating a collective atmosphere allowing some of the actors to improvise and some to stay strictly to the script. Some of it makes very little sense. In tone, its first half is comedic, the atmosphere darkening as things take a more serious turn and the truth is revealed.

At the same time, some of the film's strengths lie in the

obvious fact that, as a director, Blatty didn't have clue what he was doing. The meandering is hypnotic, it looks astonishingly beautiful, expertly lit by Gerry Fisher, and the performances are wonderful, Stacy Keach managing the difficult job of portraying a man who can't express himself except through rage. The final answer to the question 'is there a God?' is beautifully handled and surprisingly moving.

'The Ninth Configuration' may have been ignored by audiences but it got some great reviews and even won a Golden Globe for its screenplay; does this re-issue clarify it as an all-but-ignored classic, or is its mixed reception warranted? There's much to admire and it's certainly unlike almost anything else, the striking imagery and ambitious concept bringing rewards to the patient viewer but, in the end, does it offer meaning? Does it linger in the mind as other attempts at provocation do? Does it matter? For a film as individual as we are, that's entirely up to you.

ROBERT MARTIN

★★★★★★★ 7



BLOODSUCKING BOSSES

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: BRIAN JAMES O'CONNELL / SCREENPLAY: DR. GOD, RYAN MITTS / STARRING: FRAN KRANZ, PEDRO PASCAL, JOEY KERN, EMMA FITZPATRICK / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Dr. God are a comedy group who have for the past several years been performing fortnightly improv and creating short films and TV content in LA; Bloodsucking Bosses is their first feature length film, and it's a blast.

There isn't much to say about the plot that you haven't already deduced from the title. Tim (Joey Kern, with the charm, looks, accent and moustache of a young Matthew

McConaughey) works a dead-end sales job, playing computer shoot-em-ups on the company's time and knowing his position is made secure by his old friend, acting sales manager Evan (Fran Kranz), who has problems of his own. Evan has two days to put together a sales pitch for the Phallicyte account, and none of the other staff can be bothered to pitch in. He's also in trouble with head of HR Amanda (Emma Fitzpatrick, as sharp as her

haircut), who's just brought up the L-word to a breathtakingly lacklustre response. Meanwhile, Ted (Joel Murray) is hatching a plan to raise the company's efficiency that involves the recruitment of a new sales manager who learned his trade in Romania...

Much of the rest of the cast is filled out by Dr. God themselves, each of whom has his own particular place in the pecking order and idiosyncrasies and preoccupations to match, creating a completely plausible environment in which it feels like everyone has known everyone else for years. The repartee and characterisation are as quick and spiky as they are comfortable, and the visual comedy as adept and effective as the dialogue ("You're telling me we get so little sunlight in this fluorescent hole the puncture monkeys are just fine?"). Essentially taking the situation and targets of Mike Judge's Office Space and adding some of the kind of humour you had in, say, An American Werewolf in London, Bloodsucking Bosses is thoroughly enjoyable. Even the

minor players, the janitor and the security guard, are fully developed and earn themselves resolutions in the final third that are wholly consistent with their characters.

And that final act isn't a disappointment. Cheap 'horror' films often fall apart at the end where the ambition outstrips the budget, but Bloodsucking Bosses is inventive to the last, although there is of course nothing here we haven't essentially seen before. If there's a problem of any kind it's that Bloodsucking Bosses never goes for the throat, contenting itself with being all satire and no scares. But to see that as an issue would be to miss the point; this is a film for anyone who's ever worked an unfulfilling job and had dreams of decapitating their co-workers, and in that context it's a supremely well executed, delightfully creative and highly entertaining success.

Extras: Bloopers / Behind the Scenes

JR SOUTHALL

★★★★★★★ 8



THE DAY OF THE JACKAL (1973)

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: FRED ZINNEBANN / SCREENPLAY: KENNETH ROSS / STARRING: EDWARD FOX, MICHAEL LONSDALE, MICHEL AUCLAIR, DEREK JACOBI, OLGA GEORGES-PICOT / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Back in the early '60s, there were Frenchmen on the far-right who were not best pleased with Charles de Gaulle. It wasn't his accordion playing with The Bonzo Dog Doo-dah Band causing offence [eh? – Ed] as that wasn't until 1967. The problem was that he'd allowed Algeria to become independent and that never goes down well with generals and former legionnaires who'd just spent the last few years fighting in the Algerian War on their government's behalf. So, the far-right never being

ones to overreact, they formed a paramilitary group called Organisation de l'armée secrète (OAS) and repeatedly tried assassinating the general, most notoriously with an ambush led by Colonel Jean-Marie Bastien-Thiry in 1962. Despite the expenditure of an enormous amount of ammunition, they missed the general (and, indeed, everyone else) and Bastien-Thiry gained the honour of being the last person in France to be put before a firing squad. Much to the Colonel's apparent surprise, the firing squad didn't miss.

All of this inspired the then-unheard of British journalist Frederick Forsyth to base his highly authentic début novel, *The Day of the Jackal*, on the OAS' next (entirely fictional) attempt at getting de Gaulle. Having just noticed we'd lost an empire, this was a time when we were bizarrely convinced that if anyone wanted something doing properly, they'd get an English gentleman to do it (or the partly Scottish James Bond). So our angry Frenchmen do precisely that. The book was a huge success and the movie shortly followed.

Today *Jackal* feels like a piece of history, but it's still a thoroughly entertaining one. In fact, in the face of 21st century terrorism, a little bit of elegant presidential assassination seems like a jolly jape. Especially if it's done by Edward Fox doing a European travelogue in a sports car. It's *Jackal*'s combination of authenticity (the assassin's method of obtaining a false identity is now known as the "Day of the Jackal fraud") and sheer fantasy (bespoke sniper rifles and masterful one-legged disguises) that make it so

compelling; you know Bond is a load of nonsense but this *might* not be. Fox is in fine fettle in a difficult role here: he's not so much an anti-hero as a ruthless, if charming, professional, and apart from the almost schoolboy enthusiasm he has for his job, we actually know nothing about him (not even who he really is). We might be given a ringside view of his travails but we're as much in the dark about his character as the dogged cops on his trail, led by the always brilliant Michael Lonsdale. This wasn't the sort of movie Fred Zinnemann directed too often but his cranking up of the tension is pitch-perfect. Will he get away with it? Are we actually rooting for him or Michael Lonsdale? Hard to tell...

A classic thriller of the '70s and with a French President potentially being knocked off by a posh Brit, this is probably Nigel Farage's favourite film. [Naughty – Ed].

Extras: Production notes / Trailer

JOHN KNOTT

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



THE CALL UP

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: CHARLES BARKER / STARRING: PARKER SAWYERS, MORFYDD CLARK, MAX DEACON, CHRISTOPHER OBI / RELEASE DATE: MAY 23RD

In a world where we're moving closer and closer to virtual reality becoming as commonplace as checking our Instagram feeds, Charles Baker's debut feature feels perfectly timed to make a substantial comment on how today's society is consumed by the digital world. Although *The Call Up* may lack in three-dimensional characters and authentic storytelling, there seems to be a simple yet effective message warning us of the dangers of VR, and such a message comes to the forefront through a film that's both

captivating and deftly crafted.

The Call Up sees a group of online gamers called upon to test a state-of-the-art virtual reality game. Presented with cutting edge technology, the rag-tag bunch are thrown into a virtual warzone that's every gamer's fantasy come true. However, their bliss is torn asunder when the reality portion of this virtual reality becomes all too real...

For a film with such visual ingenuity, *The Call Up* doesn't get off to a great start. Stiff direction and bland characters

don't exactly set a high standard, but fortunately, the film gets to grips with its cast and loosens the rigidity of its direction as more bullets fly and more levels in this murderous game are undertaken. The cast themselves fill each of their roles with just enough effect to make them resonate with you. There's the leader, the pretty girl, the tubby one, the bully and the black guy – hardly original. *The Call Up* could certainly have benefited from a more diverse approach to its characters, lending a greater sense of humanity to the overall danger.

However, that separation between the human and the technological elements of *The Call Up* makes one sit up and pay attention to the technological elements even more. The visuals in this film have an understated grace that puts the bulk of CGI-ridden Hollywood to shame. The seamless blending between the fiction and the reality of the world in *The Call Up* gives this film a healthy dose of visual delicacy. Classy stuff for a film about a real-life shoot-'em-up video game! What's not too subtle here is the film's apparent message of VR being

a glorious thing to indulge in, but its effects on the real world can spiral out of control.

Still, *The Call Up* is an impressively riveting film, one atmosphere and set-up, which makes for quality viewing; but it's not without its faults. *The Call Up* valiantly tries to be the video game movie *Hardcore Henry* failed to be, thanks to its extreme emphasis on grotesque spectacle. In that sense, *The Call Up* is most certainly the stronger of the two, but a better handling of immersive characters and engaging plot would have allowed *The Call Up* to be a much better film. It's ultimately restricted to being a well-crafted action drama that's still somewhat enveloping, thanks to its clashing characters and jaw-dropping visual effects.

When it comes to video game movies, we're currently smothered by the likes of *Wreck-It Ralph*, *Ratchet and Clank* and *Warcraft*, and still haunted by the memories of *Pixels* and *Hardcore Henry*. *The Call Up* makes us wish video game movies were more like this.

FRED MCNAMARA

★★★★★★★★★★ 7



GHOST IN THE SHELL: THE NEW MOVIE

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: KAZUYA NOMURA, KAZUCHIKA KISE / SCREENPLAY: TOW UBUKATA / STARRING: ELIZABETH MAXWELL, JOHN SWASEY, CHRISTOPHER SABAT, ALEX ORGAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

With the recent controversy surrounding the casting of Scarlett Johansson as the Japanese character Major Motoko Kusanagi in the upcoming live action version of *Ghost in the Shell*, the awkwardly titled *Ghost in the Shell: The New Movie* comes at a potentially fortuitous time.

After the assassination of the Prime Minister, Major

Kusanagi (Elizabeth Maxwell) and her team attempt to find out who was behind it.

Ghost in the Shell: The New Movie is set after the events of the *Arise* storyline, a four part series which itself is a reimagining of the original *Ghost in the Shell*. As such, you are dumped straight in to an ongoing storyline, the complexities of which prove

very difficult to a new viewer; events and characters can be a mystery, one not cleared up by the information dump of an opening. However, if you are already up to date on the storyline, then *The New Movie* will serve as a satisfying and entertaining conclusion.

The animation, a blend of hand-drawn animation and CGI, looks wonderful of course; it flows seamlessly and allows for kinetic and exciting action scenes, which the film is littered with. *Ghost in the Shell: The New Movie* delves a little further into the concept of humanity, the enhancement of cyborg and prosthetic limbs and bodies, and the philosophical aspects that surround this. The film creates the idea that when choosing prosthetics you may choose a part that will become obsolete, which may lead to you being unable to replace or repair it. The characters are confronted with this potential, most effectively in a memorable and disturbing scene that blends science fiction with

body horror. Togusa (Alex Organ), the only member of the team without cyborg enhancements, has his own problem in attempting to come to terms with the possibility that his life is in much more danger than other members of their team every time they embark on one of their dangerous missions. The Tachikoma robots remain as entertaining as always; a child's voice and naivety inside an armoured and weaponised robotic shell. It is these characters and ideas that are the most enjoyable parts of the film.

Ghost in the Shell: The New Movie will be most enjoyed by fans of the series and those who are up to date with its storyline. For anyone coming in cold, then this isn't the place to start. It's still fitfully entertaining but enjoyment will be lost as you struggle to follow the storyline.

COURTNEY BUTTON

★★★★★★★ 7



DEATH WALKS TWICE BOXSET

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: LUCIANO ERCOLI / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: NIEVES NAVARRO, CLAUDIE LANGE, PETER MARTELL, SIMÓN ANDREU / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

If you're a fan of giallo then you're probably very happy that Arrow Video has been knocking out a fair few of these stylish Italian thrillers on Blu-ray of late. If you're not familiar with the genre, then now would be a good time to familiarise yourself because they're usually pretty good fun. This latest boxset features two Luciano Ercoli offerings from the genre's early '70s heyday with similar titles, hence the catchy "Death

Walks Twice" tag.

Death Walks on High Heels (1971) has one of the best movie titles ever and all the usual giallo tropes. A diamond thief is stabbed on a train and his stripper daughter (Nieves Navarro appearing as Susan Scott) is soon being stalked by a scary bloke with blue eyes and a disguised voice who clearly thinks she knows where some of his diamonds were hidden. Is it her boyfriend? Don't be silly,

this is giallo, it's never going to be that simple. In fact, it's going to be ludicrously complicated, with more red herrings than you can wave a fishing rod at, with an ending that'll make you say "yeah, I suppose that makes sense". Actually, as this one is largely set in an English fishing village (no, really) there's more herrings than you might expect, including an erotic fish-eating scene (which isn't very). There's also the bizarre sight of Navarro doing a striptease while blacked-up in an afro-wig (they don't let you do that anymore) and possibly the only cinematic occurrence of a pair of thigh-high boots being integral to the plot. Word of warning: the movie also features Claudie Lange, who looks identical to Nieves Navarro, so be prepared for some extra "hit-rewind" confusion. Actually, this may even be deliberate. There's also the scariest British pub we've ever seen and a suspect fishmonger. Just enjoy the ride.

Death Walks at Midnight (1972) is the same team and practically the same cast, but this time we start with Navarro taking some hallucinogenics for the purposes of a magazine

article (like you do). Of course, while under the influence, she sees a murder of a woman by a man with a spiked glove. Is this some deep-buried memory? Then the man starts to stalk her (of course he does). Then it all gets far more complicated, but at least Claudie Lange has a different hairstyle this time, otherwise it'd just be too hard to follow. In the end, it all makes perfect giallo-sense.

As you'd expect, these are both sexy and beautifully shot, so Blu-ray is the best way to watch them. The soundtracks are also unspeakably groovy. One other bonus feature they don't mention: if you're feeling lazy and decide to watch the dubbed versions (rather than the subtitles), you get to watch the same cast (including the same copper) talk with entirely different voices in each movie. It tickled us.

Extras: English and Italian versions / Audio commentary by Tim Lucas / Trailers / Interviews / Booklet.

JOHN KNOTT

★★★★★★★ 8



THE PLAYGIRLS AND THE VAMPIRE (1960)

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: PIERO REGNOLI / STARRING: LYLA ROCCO, WALTER BRANDI, MARIA GIOVANNINI, ALFREDO RIZZO, MARISA QUATTRINI, LEONARDO BOTTA / RELEASED: OUT NOW

At the end of the '50s, there were many things the British liked to think we were world-beaters at: winning wars, creating the NHS, conquering unconquerable mountains, designing jet engines, inventing hovercraft, losing empires, being humiliated over Egyptian canals... oh well, maybe not. But at least there was one thing that made us the envy of the world. Thanks to the mighty Hammer Studios, we did horror flicks like no one else. Hammer was popular all

over and nowhere more so than Italy. So did those stylish-yet-saucy Italians have a go themselves? Of course, and they became something of an erotically horrifying genre in their own right, but there was a brief period when they were a bit more faithful to the Hammer model.

The Playgirls and the Vampire actually starts out more like Scooby Doo than Hammer, with a troop of dancers dodging a hotel bill and being forced by the inclement weather to stay at that castle everyone just

told them to avoid. Even the occupants tell them to clear off until a low budget bridge gives way (so low budget we never see it) and they're stuck. But why does Vera (Rocco) think she's been here before? Why does the resident Count (Brandi) look so startled to see her? We can't possibly imagine. Well, it'll all be OK as long as they stay in their rooms, which they don't. They wander about in their babydoll nighties (although Vera's is a bit longer as she's the romantic lead). Next thing we know, one is dead and there are mysterious goings-on afoot. Well, it is supposed to be a horror movie.

Actually, that's the one thing that is wrong with Playgirls. While it has aspirations to be creepy (nice castle etc.), it just isn't. Director Piero Regnoli looks like he simply wasn't trying hard enough on that front. Nice opening shot of a coffin and that's about it. Mind you, he probably wasn't paid very well, as this is micro-budget stuff. It's a good-natured film and there's much hilarity to be had from the fact none of the dancers can actually dance (that scene is brilliant) and that when Vera sees the painting

of "Margherita Kernassy: 1746-1782" who looks (not very much) like her, the Count says: "She lived here and died in 1785". We actually rewound to check. Curiously, in the subtitled version he says "a hundred years ago" which is even further adrift. But to be fair, there's a nice twist and the climax even riffs on Hammer's Dracula (1958). Anything particularly Italian about it? Not really. These were early days and there's none of the style, sex and horror we get from later Italian offerings, unless you count a lot of nighties, an incongruous and ineffective striptease, and the fact that the dead woman comes back to life and spends the rest of the film naked but tastefully lit.

So, not a terrible movie but not what you might expect. Mario Bava it isn't.

Extras: Kim Newman interview / 8mm version of *Last Fling of the Vampire* / Trailer / Extra Scene from French Version

JOHN KNOTT

★★★★★ 6



MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA AND OTHER WORKS BY DZIGA VERTOV (1929)

DUAL / CERT: E / DIRECTOR: DZIGA VERTOV / STARRING: LENIN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Avant-garde Soviet documentary may not be the most enticing movie night idea, but anyone interested in film history should know the name Dziga Vertov. The key figure in the 'cinema-eye' collective of filmmakers, Vertov rejected 'staged' cinema – actors, scripts, all that rubbish – and developed a Marxist style inspired by newsreel footage, using the camera to capture real life then editing the footage into a coherent overview of society. Man With a Movie

Camera (1929), his most famous work, was named the best documentary of all time in a 2014 BFI poll, and is collected in this new set along with four of his other films.

Man With a Movie Camera is about the people of Russia; the life of the city (it was filmed in Kiev, Kharkov, Moscow and Odessa) is shown in all its detail. People get up, go to work, and play sports. People get married, others get divorced. A child is born. Intricate editing places the factory machines

and switchboard operators perfectly in time with the film's music, turning the city into a symphony. Vertov's use of film is very playful, showing us the eponymous cameraman as he sets up the shots we then see, and even making use of optical illusions, such as placing the cameraman inside a beer glass. It all comes together to create an innovative and remarkable piece of cinema that, even in 2016, is an engaging, energetic watch, as well as a fascinating historical document.

The other films are similarly intriguing, if not as consistently watchable. Kino-Eye (1924) has a similar style, portraying the lives of children in a small village. It also experiments with playing film backwards, reversing the entire production process of bread – from loaves being distributed to crops being harvested! It's comparatively disjointed and slow going, but nonetheless lays the groundwork for what was to come. Kino-Pravda #21 (1925) is a memorial to the recently deceased Lenin, incorporating newsreel footage of his life before showing us his funeral and reactions to his death. Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Donbass (1931) goes down

into the mines of the Don coal basin, focusing on the miners as they work hard to fulfil the Five Year Plan. Finally, Three Songs About Lenin (1934) celebrates the achievements of the Soviet Union's founder; it's unashamed propaganda to modern eyes, and not at all subtle, flashing the word 'LENIN' on screen in big letters more times than you ever wanted to see, but it is expertly edited propaganda.

Eureka Entertainment has done a stellar job with this release, presenting all four films in beautifully restored high-def and packing in a load of worthwhile extras – though the main film alone is essential viewing for any cinephile. You won't regret adding this to your collection – and if you don't love Lenin yet, you will by the end of it.

Extras: Film Scores / Audio Commentary / The Life and Times of Dziga Vertov – Exclusive Video Interview / Visual Essay by David Cairns / 100-Page Limited Edition Book

KIERON MOORE

★★★★★ 9



THE ZERO BOYS (1986)

DUAL / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: NICO MASTORAKIS / STARRING: DANIEL HIRSCH, KELLI MARONEY, NICOLE RIO, TOM SHELL, JARED MOSES, CRYSTAL CARSON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Zero Boys is something of a slow burn. As such, how much you enjoy the movie will depend on whether or not you prefer horror that takes its time to unwind. Most of the movie is about introducing the characters and setting up the situation that they find themselves in; it isn't until the latter half that the characters become aware of the

danger and the movie doesn't truly hit its stride until the last 20-30 minutes.

The Zero Boys focuses less on jump scares and gore than it does a general atmosphere of suspense. The people behind the Blu-ray have done an excellent job at remastering the movie for HD; the visuals are crystal clear

and director Nico Mastorakis was right when he said that the film had been given the appearance of something shot more recently. The visuals gel perfectly with the score (composed by a young Hans Zimmer) to reinforce the idea that danger is always around the corner.

Sadly, this tension isn't always present when it comes to the villains of the movie. We get a vague sense of who is coming after the characters and we get a glimpse at their motivations in a manner similar to the torture porn movies that would follow decades later, but we never get a sense of what it is that the villains get out of their actions. The actors manage to do their best with what they are given but getting a greater sense of who they were could have added a greater feeling of menace.

When watching The Zero Boys, it is easy to see the early days of elements that have since become commonplace in more recent movies. It does get some of these right and there

is fun to be had in watching it. However, the elements introduced in movies like these have been improved upon by the movies that followed.

Like any good remastering, the film is something of a time capsule. It's crisp in its presentation and the movie has aged well enough to not suffer as a result. There are a few fun extra features, the most noteworthy of which involves Nico Mastorakis sitting down to have an interview with himself. The interview is conducted with the right amount of tongue-in-cheek humour to stop it being silly. It also helps that the director actually asks himself serious questions about the movie and how it was made, rather than merely stroking his ego. The Zero Boys is worth getting for anyone looking for something fun to watch for an evening in.

GARETH EVANS

★★★★★★★ 6



CITIZEN KANE - 75TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

BD / CERT: U / DIRECTOR: ORSON WELLES / SCREENPLAY: ORSON WELLES, HERMAN J. MANKIEWICZ / STARRING: ORSON WELLES, JOSEPH COTTON, EVERETT SLOANE, DOROTHY COMINGORE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

There are films that people normally take for granted, yet every once in a while, there's one movie that comes along, challenges people's perception about cinema, and is instantly regarded as a masterpiece in cinema history. Citizen Kane is one of those films, and ever since its release 75 years ago, it's been hailed – almost universally – as the single best motion picture that has ever been made, and its champions have constantly compared it with other cinematic gems,

almost as a means of saying "they don't make films like they used to". Truthfully, that comparative statement has been flogged to death, but that doesn't detract from the huge impact this film made back then and how in this modern age, the film's subject matter is strangely still relevant.

The film's titular antihero was inspired by media mogul William Randolph Hearst, who was that generation's Donald Trump, frankly; ironically, Hearst detested the film so much, he

tried everything in his power to prevent the movie from reaching release. Also, the fact that Kane is married and divorced twice and has everything only to lose it all is heavily reminiscent of Jordan Belfort in The Wolf of Wall Street; however, unlike that film, this contains an emotional core that keeps you invested. It is a film about the loss of innocence and the longing for happiness, whilst also centrally being about life versus death, which is the strongest and most common theme in most famous literature, and that's one of the central reasons why this film is still a cinematic classic.

Throughout the film, you're constantly trying to grasp the film's meaning, and it isn't until the final moments that the film really hits home with its powerful message; you start feeling uncertain, yet this is followed by a feeling of enlightenment and appreciation that makes the film such a meaningful and emotional experience. Another aspect that has made the film so revered is in its technicality, which at the time, was viewed as revolutionary. The concept of having Kane's life play out by jumping in and out of non-linear flashbacks might've made the film convoluted, but instead, it's surprisingly well structured and very easy for casual audiences

to keep track of.

However, the real key component that made everything work was one man: Orson Welles. He basically went through a David and Goliath - style battle to get the film made - tackling with Hearst, trying to get the studio execs off his back and, through making the shooting schedules long and arduous, constantly clashing with the production crew. Plus, the film received boos when it was nominated at the Oscars. Then again, the great visionaries were often unappreciated at first; take Vincent van Gogh for example! Like van Gogh, Welles put his heart and soul into each and every one of his projects, and with Citizen Kane (his debut feature), he literally put his blood, sweat and tears into making this his masterpiece.

In that sense, Citizen Kane is a film that broke the mould for moviemaking; from the meticulously planned camera work to the towering performances (not least from Welles himself), there isn't a single component that doesn't make this a stunning achievement in all aspects of filmmaking.

RYAN POLLARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 10



ME AND MY MATES VS THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE

DVD + VOD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: DECLAN SHRUBB / STARRING: JIM JEFFERIES, ALEX WILLIAMSON, GREG FLEET, ANDY TRIEU, ADELE VUKO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Stewth and other Australian stereotypes – popular antipodean comedian Jim Jefferies stars in this comedy horror film about friends fending off zombies in an industrial office building. It's a lower-budget party than

one might expect from a film starring known name Jefferies, but worth a look all the same.

Here two popular subgenres meet – the Shaun of the Dead bro-ish zom-com and the Australian horror flick. It's not the best of either

world, but it's a whole lot better than it could have been. After all, if there's one thing the horror scene could do with less of, it's Shaun of the Dead-esque zom-coms. This one has a familiar setup: the dead have risen, and a bunch of mates hole up together to ride it out. In terms of tone and attitude, it bears more in common with Doghouse or Stag Night of the Dead than it does Shaun or Braindead.

It's a beer-swilling, potty-mouthed vein of humour that's easy to hate but even easier to watch. Low as the budget is, the action is pretty good, the banter (with apologies for using the word 'banter') reasonably amusing. 'Reasonably amusing' is far from stunning praise, but it's the best you can expect from Declan Shrubbs's debut feature. In typical low-budget zombie fashion, much of it involves grubby men sitting in a room together bickering and leering over the only girl

in the movie (in this case, the daughter of one of their number). Alex Williamson is the 'me' of the title, a cheery hat-wearing type who seems relatively unfazed by the zombie apocalypse unfolding around him. Jefferies plays mate Joel, very much a deadpan Jim Jefferies type performance; familiar to anyone who's a fan of his stand-up routines. Greg Fleet's Roy rounds up the trio of mates, playing the dad to 'me's' crush and subtly the funniest of the three (sorry Jim). One's enjoyment of *Me and My Mates vs the Zombie Apocalypse* will very much depend on how funny you find its leading men. This reviewer did laugh quite hard at "a nightmare on balls street."

A better setting could have solved some of its problems.

JOEL HARLEY

★★★★★★★★★★ 6



1900 (1976)

BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: BERNARDO BERTOLUCCI / SCREENPLAY: BERNARDO BERTOLUCCI, GIUSEPPE BERTOLUCCI, FRANCO ARCALLI / STARRING: GÉRARD DEPARDIEU, ROBERT DE NIRO, DOMINIQUE SANDA, FRANCESCA BERTINI, LAURA BETTI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Masters of Cinema is a line of Blu-rays and DVDs that aims to showcase the work of well-known directors from around the world, and *1900* is one of the most recent movies to be brought back under this label. It tells the story of two men who were born on the same day in 1900 but grow up in very different circumstances. Olmo, played by Gérard Depardieu, is the son of a plantation worker and grows up to be a socialist. Alfredo (Robert De Niro), on the other

hand, is a rich landowner and grows up to be a fascist. Because of its five-hour-twenty-minute running time, the movie is divided up into two parts. One on each disc.

1900 is at its strongest when it explores the central friendship between these two characters, with the political history of Italy serving as a backdrop. Depardieu and De Niro have great chemistry; you can see how their friendship could be formed but you also see the strains on the

friendship early on. When they slowly begin to find themselves opposite each other, it feels like the natural path their lives would take them down and not a contrivance of the story.

Unfortunately, the film lacks the focus to really capitalise on this friendship or on Olmo and Alfredo themselves. The plot of the movie depends on how the two have developed as people but it often feels like we are only getting the outline of their stories. As a character, Alfredo suffers from this far more than Olmo. His wife criticises the man that he has become but we too rarely get to see this for ourselves. We don't see enough of Alfredo become the man he is accused of being and so accusations against him lack weight. We don't see how Alfredo actually runs the plantation when he inherits it.

The lack of focus on the friendship between the two friends hurts the movie because it means their friendship fails to serve as a unifying theme for the movie in the way that it should. The movie spans 45 years of Italian history and it doesn't feel as cohesive as it could; the many historical jumps that the movie makes do sometimes come without warning, and occasionally the audience could be forgiven for missing them entirely.

In fairness to the film, this

lack of attention to the leads is made up for in part by the attention it gives to its side characters, the most noteworthy of which is Attila, the foreman of the plantation (Donald Sutherland). The audience is witness to his repeated acts of cruelty and, as a result, it really matters when we see where the choices he has made lead him. Had a similar amount of time been spent with Olmo and Alfredo, *1900* would be a much stronger movie.

1900 is a strong tale of friendship let down by spending too much time trying to juggle all of its component parts without truly managing to blend them into a single narrative. It has strong moments and a great cast but fails from an editing standpoint. Regardless of these flaws, it is still worth viewing.

Extras: *The Story, The Cast and Creating an Epic*, two video pieces from 2006 featuring Bertolucci and Storaro / *Bertolucci secondo il cinema, an hour-long on-set documentary about the making of 1900* / A booklet featuring the words of Bernardo Bertolucci, archival imagery, and more

GARETH EVANS

★★★★★★★★★★ 6



I AM WRATH

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: CHUCK RUSSELL / SCREENPLAY: PAUL SLOAN, YVAN GAUTHIER / STARRING: JOHN TRAVOLTA, CHRISTOPHER MELONI, AMANDA SCHULL, SAM TRAMMELL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When his wife is tragically killed in a seemingly random robbery, and corrupt police officers fail to do anything about her death, and grieving husband Stanley Hill takes matters into his own hands. It turns out that Stanley and his barber friend Dennis have a very particular set of skills from their former lives as CIA black ops and they soon begin killing their way through the city underworld towards the truth.

The unexpected success of *Taken* and the even more surprising reinvention of Liam Neeson as an action hero has sparked a trend of aging dramatic actors taking on similar roles. It's been previously established that Travolta is perfectly capable of doing action, most memorably as the possibly insane Charlie Wax in Pierre Morel's equally mental Euro schlock thriller *From Paris*

With Love, but Stanley is a far less interesting presence to spend 100 minutes watching.

Such is the unimaginative nature of *I Am Wrath*, you'll have the entire plot mapped out after ten minutes, for all the minimal significance it actually has on proceedings. Director Chuck Russell may have some questionable entries on his CV, but regardless of objective quality, at least everything he's previously had a hand in has possessed some degree of fun. There is an overwhelming feeling of merely going through the motions here, regarding both the film and those acting in it, with the greatest tragedy being Rebecca De Mornay – who really deserves a lot better – being reduced to a walk-on sacrificial role.

The handheld filming style is presumably meant to ascribe some gritty authenticity to an otherwise overly generic revenge plot, but merely makes an already boring story appear amateurishly shot, and is periodically amplified by music that appears to believe on-screen events are far more dramatic than they actually

are. Likewise, the unnecessary use of slow motion, which rather than heightening the impact of attempted emotional sucker punches, instead emphasises how insignificant the unfolding action actually is.

Attempts to infuse some meaning to the wafer-thin setup come in the form of some late-stage rambling about divine forgiveness, and corruption, and damnation, in a ham-fisted and frankly laughable attempt to portray Travolta as some sort of avenging angel (hence the film's title), which serves only to further highlight just how meaningless it all is.

Unlike, say, *John Wick*, which actually elevated itself through its taciturn minimalism, *I Am Wrath* is a monotonous slog from overfamiliar start to inevitable finish, during which no amount of lazy shootouts or poor fight choreography can inspire even a glimmer of excitement.

ANDREW MARSHALL

★★★★★ 4



THE FORGOTTEN

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: OLIVER FRAMPTON / SCREENPLAY: JAMES HALL, OLIVER FRAMPTON / STARRING: CLEM TIBBER, SHAUN DINGWALL, ELARICA GALLACHER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Forgotten is probably the kind of horror film that Ian McEwan or Iain Banks might have written, its preoccupations being mental illness and the ties that bind us – and its supernatural aspect probably being its weakest element. Alternatively, you might consider it *Kidulthood* with ghosts, its setting being a mostly deserted sink estate somewhere in London and its cast giving the drama rather more social verisimilitude than

cheap B-movies are generally used to.

When Tommy's aunt goes away, she leaves him in the care of a father who, it transpires, has been living alone in a squat in a housing estate that's been emptied ahead of being demolished. Mark has been making a "living" strip-thieving the abandoned flats of their copper piping, and while there's no electricity there's plenty of spare cash for takeaways.

But during the nights Tommy hears strange noises coming from the vacant flat next door, and as he and his new friend Carmen investigate, they begin to uncover a shared history that neither of them can be comfortable with.

First-time director Oliver Hampton has a history in televised police dramas, having co-created 2013 BBC miniseries *Life of Crime* and script edited *The Bill*, and it's in how *The Forgotten* deals with historical criminal activity that it's strongest, particularly as it follows Tommy and Carmen's investigation and subsequently the effect their discoveries bring about. The way Hampton and co-screenwriter James Hall (another alumnus of *The Bill*) tease out the connections between the main characters is assured and absorbing, if a little predictable by the story's end. But the paranormal disturbances that both Tommy and eventually Carmen share – while progressing logically out of their mutual associations – tend to undermine the conclusions the story reaches. It's an easier sell for a first-time director if he can cross his genres in two markets, of

course. And the ghost story is supremely well executed and not a little terrifying, even if it's also rather familiar.

The acting is sometimes a little over-natural, for the most part lending the film a feeling of absolute realism but occasionally hesitating towards a woodenness – albeit one that resonates with the emotional stiltedness of the characters – but the deep-focus pseudo-documentary photography is gorgeous and authentic, emphasising the sparseness not just of the locations but also of the characters' internal lives. The inside of the flat is a frighteningly blank space, shrouded in shadows lit only by stark lamplight – and would have been just as startling without the need to affect a haunting on the environment.

There's no question that *The Forgotten* works exceptionally well. Not entirely unlike a more straight-laced horror equivalent of *Attack the Block*, it is difficult to tear your eyes away from.

JR SOUTHALL

★★★★★ 7

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BBC Radio

We've been spoiled with a good selection of genre audio on the BBC recently, some of which should still be available on iPlayer Radio. The following is in no particular order.

Eddie Robson's **Welcome to Our Village, Please Invade Carefully** had a welcome repeat of Series Two on Radio 4 Extra. This stars Peter Davison, Hattie Morahan, Jan Francis and Hannah Murray, among others and was first broadcast in 2014. The BBC website for the show also has some galleries, clips and a feature **draft 0 to draft 8** giving insight into the writing of the show.

If you prefer more classic radio science fiction, Radio 4 Extra has broadcast all 14 parts of the BD Chapman adventure **Orbiter X**. This was first broadcast in 1959, and is centred on the construction of **Orbiter X**, a pre-fabricated space station, a topic very much in the public eye with Tim Peake's exploits in space today.

We also had Robin Laing playing psychic Thomas Soutar in **Heart of Darkness**, a two-part story by Alastair Jessiman, and also a two-part retelling of Homer's **Odyssey** in the form of **Missing Presumed Dead: The Odyssey**, in which a government minister on the run in Europe is plunged into the ancient past and must contend with unnatural phenomena and unworldly beings. The cast members mostly play two parts and include Colin Tierney, Simon Dutton and Polly Frame.

Scribe Awards Nominees Revealed

The tenth annual Scribe Awards (as given by the International Association of Media Tie-in Writers), has announced the Scribe Award Nominees for 2016. The audio section consists of five stories, all from Big Finish. The list is:

Dark Shadows: Bloodlust by A. Flanagan, W. Howells, and J. Lidster
Dark Shadows: In the Twinkling of an Eye by Penelope Faith
Doctor Who: The Red Lady by John Dorney
Doctor Who: Damaged Goods by Jonathan Morris
Pathfinder Legends: Mummy's Mask: Empty Graves by Cavan Scott.

Dark Shadows is the topic of a feature on page 54 of this issue, and any of these would be worthy winners.

More STRANGENESS to Come

Strangeness in Space continues its crowdsourced productions, and at the time of writing Episode Four is almost fully funded. This will bring Paterson Joseph into an episode titled **Pet Shock Boys**. We recently reviewed the first three episodes of this entertaining series starring former **Doctor Who** companion Sophie Aldred, along with Saturday Morning TV legends Trevor and Simon, and a range of special guests, including Rufus Hound. The first three episodes

were described as postmodern and funny, a rare combination. More information on strangenessinspace.com.

And Finally...

One last mention for Rufus Hound, who has just recorded two stories for Big Finish in their **Short Trips** range. Details for several new releases in this range (including the recent Sheridan Smith release, **The Curse of the Fugue**) are on the Big Finish website.

BIG FINISH WE LOVE STORIES

Key titles to watch out for this month from Big Finish...

DRACULA

The classic Bram Stoker tale has been remade numerous times, and this new audio drama version stars the inimitable Mark Gatiss in the role of the blood sucking Count. With Gatiss being a massive fan of horror, this promises to be the definitive adaptation, and the release comes with a bonus CD including interviews with the cast and writer Jonathan Barnes, as well as a selection of music from James Dunlop's soundtrack.

AVAILABLE MAY 31st

+++

GALLIFREY 8. ENEMY LINES

Spinning off from the regular **Doctor Who** range, this series focuses on the more political goings-on in the Doctor's home world. Six more half-hour tales spread over three discs sees Romana (Lalla Ward) and Leela (Louise Jameson) embroiled in more perilous adventures as they face struggles with timelines looming war.

AVAILABLE MAY 31ST

+++

CYBERMAN - THE COMPLETE SERIES 1 & 2

Another set available only from the Big Finish website, this collects both series of the exciting and terrifying **Cyberman** stories. An intrepid group of humans attempt to resist and defeat the impending and seemingly unstoppable menace of the Cybermen.

AVAILABLE MAY 31ST

+++

TORCHWOOD 2.3 GHOST MISSION

One of the side characters in the TV series, Sergeant Andy Davidson (Tom Price), takes centre stage here as he attempts to join the elite Torchwood organisation. His assessment doesn't entirely go as planned when he has to tackle a chemical spill, roaming monsters, and an ancient entity.

AVAILABLE MAY 31st

+++

DOCTOR WHO: SHORT TRIPS 6.05 THIS SPORTING LIFE

The series of short stories continues with this new tale set during the First Doctor's tenure and narrated by Peter Purves (who played companion Steven Taylor). This story takes place during the lead-up to the 1966 World Cup and the Doctor, Steven and Dodo become entangled in the matter.

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AND RATED



STRIKER (1987)

COMPOSER: DETTO MARIANO / LABEL: STELLE
EDIZIONI MUSICALI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Listening to the opening track of Detto Mariano's score to the 1987 Rambo knock-off, *Striker*, one can't help but wonder what would have happened had the composer had the budget to create what this score so obviously wants to be. Mariano's score to the Enzo Castellari-directed, Umberto Lenzi-scripted action film was obviously written for a full orchestra and band, but presented via synthesiser.

Frankly, this is a case of doing the absolute most with the absolute least. It almost seems as if Mariano pushed his synthesisers to their limits. On the "M_03" cue, he's obviously not only worked in a faux mariachi horn section, but modified what must be a harpsichord setting to produce something akin to a flamenco guitar. The rock 'n' roll electric guitar chords are impressive, but that's some next-level dedication.

The addition of various sound effects and dialogue snippets could've been irritating, but given the rather repetitive nature of Mariano's cues, dropping in something like helicopter sounds on "M_05" and other tracks breaks up the monotony of *Striker*'s score. The people at Private Records refer to the concept as a "film sonoro," which is essentially an audio movie, "capturing the audio sequences of the movie in the right order underlaid with decent sound effects of the movie."

Quite a few cues just end, abruptly, seemingly cut off in the midst of a note, which makes for a disconcerting experience here and there. It's grand that this score is presented chronologically, as it does allow for an experience which has a really cinematic arc to it. Upon your first listen, it seems rather simplistic, but once you start listening to it based on what it's

aiming for, rather than what it's limited by, it's so much more grandly impressive.

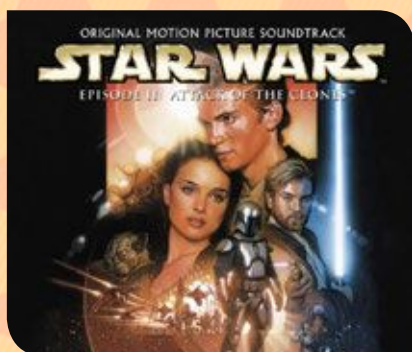
Also impressive is the fact that the score comes packaged with a full-on survival knife. That's right: the survival knife one saw advertised in the back of comic books, complete with sharpening stone and compass on the bottom of the handle. It's ridiculous, even coming from a company that frequently packages their adult film score reissues with coloured sex toys. It led to a slightly bowed LP when it arrived in the post, but by no means warped.

For the most part, this is a pretty tinny release, but that's due more to the synths being used than any production issues. Mariano's score exists mainly in the upper register, although there are some low-end contrasts which come through nicely - think of it as being mostly brass, but with an occasional cello part to deepen things.

Definitely track down the Detto Mariano score for *Striker* if you're a fan of Italian knock-offs, or if you're looking for instruction on how to make the most with what you have. Never has a synthesiser score aimed so high and succeeded so well.

NICK SPACEK

★★★★★★★ 7



STAR WARS: EPISODE II ATTACK OF THE CLONES (2002)

COMPOSER: JOHN WILLIAMS / LABEL: I AM SHARK
/ RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The second instalment of I Am Shark's vinyl releases for the Star Wars prequels looks amazing. Whereas *The Phantom Menace* came in a wide array of vinyl colours - ranging from Qui-Gon green and brown marble to hyperdrive black with white splatter and everything in between - this first pressing comes in one variant, and that's Jango Fett silver and royal blue. The vinyl

looks astonishingly good, and the gatefold sleeve in which it's packaged comes with Drew Struzan's poster art on the cover, and an amazing gatefold spread of the clone army inside. But as beauty is only skin deep, the real question is: how does it sound? The short answer is "great", with a slightly longer one being, "better than *The Phantom Menace*". TPM sounded just a touch muddy, but never in any way to which one could specifically point. *Attack of the Clones*, however, sounds bright, vibrant and dynamic in a way that leaps out of your speakers.

While the cues in AOTC might not be as well-known as those in the rest of John Williams' Star Wars oeuvre - there's no "Duel of the Fates" or "Imperial March" to be found within these 13 tracks - this score works best as a complete album. There's a real sense of unity to the music of AOTC that lets these pieces flow from one to the other, and while that means that there's less of the loud-quiet-loud dynamic that so infuses Williams' compositions for the rest of the franchise, it really works for the better.

Additionally, when listening to this score, one gets the very adventurous (for John Williams, at least) addition of electric guitars in "Zam the Assassin and the Chase

Through Coruscant". It's the sort of track which would be de rigueur for any other sci-fi action film, but in the hands of John Williams, it seems positively left-field.

If you're a Star Wars or John Williams fan, this is obviously a necessity for your collection, and the presentation certainly makes it worth owning, both in terms of sound and vision. Additionally, the fine folks at I Am Shark weren't satisfied with recreating the compact disc release, choosing instead to offer up a bonus.

When you pay attention to Side B of the second LP, you'll notice that your turntable's arm doesn't return when it reaches the end of "Confrontation with Count Dooku and Finale", and that there appears to be a second track. If you want to hear the track for yourself, you'll have to lift the tone arm to get past the locked groove that hides it.

This is a solid release of an overlooked instalment in John Williams' Star Wars scores. Even if it's not 100% one of your favourite films in the franchise, it's well worth taking another listen to.

NICK SPACEK

★★★★★★★ 8



ALIEN: OUT OF THE SHADOWS

AUTHOR: TIM LEBBON / **DIRECTOR:** DIRK MAGGS /
STARRING: MATTHEW LEWIS, LAUREL LEFKOW, COREY
JOHNSON, RUTGER HAUER / **PUBLISHER:** AUDIBLE
STUDIOS / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

'In space no one can hear you scream', as the tagline to Ridley Scott's seminal 1979 *Alien* informed us. Well, there's plenty of screaming to be heard in Audible's *Alien: Out of the Shadows* full cast audio dramatisation, written, produced and directed by the legendary Dirk Maggs. Adapted from Tim Lebbon's 2014 novel, which has been confirmed as canon by 20th Century Fox, this is the official sequel to *Alien*.

In fact the drama opens with Ripley narrating her final log entry before she and Jonesy enter hypersleep at the end of *Alien*. Then some 37 years later, Ripley is inadvertently picked up by the orbital mining freighter the *Marion* just as two of its drop ships appear, in which the on-

board cameras reveal the crew being attacked by the iconic xenomorphs. When the captain is killed, Chief Engineer Hooper finds himself in command and responsible for not just the lives of his crew, but also for the survivor of the only previous alien encounter. Ripley and the *Marion*'s crew find themselves in a life and death struggle not only against the alien infestation but also against Ash, the Artificial Intelligence that will stop at nothing to secure an alien specimen alive.

It is truly astonishing how Maggs has managed to convey the aesthetic of the original film. Although you can't see the huge, grimy industrial ship, you just know that the *Marion* is a huge, grimy industrial ship through the sounds, the echoes, and the apathetic way in which the crew conduct themselves. The mine scenes are also hugely effective, with the sound design stunningly effective in creating a sense of claustrophobia in the long dark tunnels before opening into huge chambers that contain derelict spacecraft. The use of the movie's sound effects also adds much to this audio drama, which really helps to ground this story within the *Alien* universe.

The cast are outstanding, but Laurel Lefkow's performance as Ripley is just perfect. Her vocal mannerisms and inflection are practically identical to that of Sigourney Weaver. This reviewer had to check the cast list just to be sure that it wasn't actually Weaver. In what must be called an inspired piece of casting, Rutger Hauer plays Ash, the homicidal AI program, hell bent on completing his mission as programmed by his Weyland Yutani masters. The fact that Hauer sounds nothing like Ian Holm, who played

Ash in Scott's movie, is amusingly addressed. Indeed it is Ash that provides the humour, albeit in a very dry, laconic manner, in what would otherwise be a relentlessly grim and brutal drama. James Hannigan's music also echoes that of Jerry Goldsmith (*Alien*) and James Horner (*Aliens*) and he would be a welcome return, should Audible produce more of these adaptations.

The only criticisms that can be levied on *Alien: Out of the Shadows* are not on the vocal performances or sound design but rather the story itself. As this story is set between *Alien* and *Aliens*, there is little sense of Ripley in jeopardy, and the other characters are essentially alien fodder. And we know what you're asking yourselves: "How come Ripley has no recollection of these events in *Aliens*?" Well, rest assured that is explained too in a plausible if somewhat contrived manner. These are minor niggles in what is otherwise a tight, tense, rollercoaster of a ride, and although the characters, other than Ripley, are expendable, when they do meet their inevitable demise it is shocking and, dare we say, tinged with an element of sadness, which is a testament to the entire cast's performance.

At its near five hours running time, not once does *Alien: Out of the Shadows* lose momentum. It's as cinematic in scope and sound as any of its silver screen brethren, and a darn sight better and more enjoyable than anything post-*Aliens*. Yes, that includes you too, Prometheus! Happy *Alien* Day!

CHRISTIAN JONES

★★★★★★★ 8



DARK STAR (1974)

COMPOSER: JOHN CARPENTER / **LABEL:** WE
RELEASE WHATEVER THE FUCK WE WANT /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's a strange thing when the most famous piece of music on a soundtrack is not only not by the composer, but also credited to a different act altogether. It's not exactly unheard of for KPM library music to turn

up in the strangest of places, but the piece with which *Dark Star* is most closely associated, "When Twilight Falls on NGC 891", by Martin Segundo and the Scintilla Strings, is actually a library cut by James Clarke under the rather benign name of "Spring Bossa".

John Carpenter's score is part and parcel with the movie - quite literally, actually. This is a remastered version of the original 1980 LP release, wherein music, dialogue, and sound effects from the 1974 sci-fi black comedy are all strung together in a "theater of the mind" kind of thing. It's a film on record, basically. If you're a fan of the film, it's a grand affair, but otherwise, it's a little weird. Films on record always end up being slightly disorienting, if you're not as familiar with the movie as you'd like.

The real appeal to this release is the bonus 7-inch on red vinyl, which contains full versions of the three tracks heard on the LP, ready for you to spin at your next party. Be it the country rock of "Benson Arizona" by Dominik Hauser, or Alan Howarth's "Ode to a Bell Jar", along with the aforementioned Martin Segundo

track, the 7-inch is really where it's at.

Strangely, though, the entire PR for this release touted the inclusion of "endless loops of sound effects from the movie to turn your house into your very own scout ship" on that 7-inch, but there's none to be heard on the copy we have. There's a great audio version of the film's trailer, which is absolutely great, but we were certainly looking forward to getting weird and freaking out our cats with those audio effects.

Dark Star has a great cover, though, with a great inner sleeve, as well. Other than that, it's pretty light on additional materials - as per usual with WRWTFWW - but the audio contained on the release is so spectacular and so much in demand, one's simply over the moon just being able to have it in an affordable form, regardless of liner notes or bonuses - and, really, we probably would've paid what the LP cost just for the 7-inch.

NICK SPACEK

★★★★★★★ 7



CALL ME JACKS

CALL ME JACKS

CAST: JACQUELINE PEARCE, NICHOLAS BRIGGS / PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

As both an actress and a raconteur, Jacqueline Pearce is a force of nature. Her performance as Servalan, the towering villainess of BBC space-opera-on-a-shoestring *Blake's 7*, dominated the show, even when she wasn't on screen. Dressed in the most flamboyant and preposterous costumes that the budget (and the wardrobe department's ingenuity) could stretch to, Servalan was the Cersei Lannister of her day: scheming, manipulative, a consummate survivor, and a political chameleon of the first order. A ruthless commander with a cruel streak as sharp as her tongue, Servalan was always a more interesting figure than the doggedly driven Roj Blake, and it was those rare and enticing entanglements between Servalan and the equally arch and calculating Avon that provided some of the show's most electric confrontations.

Since her recent return to the UK, Pearce has worked on several Big Finish audio projects, and it's not hard to imagine how quickly the anecdotes and recollections Pearce shared between takes convinced everyone in the studio that there was great potential in recording episodes from the story of her life in a more systematic way. The result is *Call Me Jacks*, a revealing and utterly engrossing conversation between Pearce and Big Finish stalwart Nicholas Briggs, which revisits some of the episodes covered in her 2012 autobiography *From Byfleet to the Bush*. In contrast to the long-running genre interview series *Myth Makers* that Briggs presented (he and Pearce met up in edition 59), this is more of an exercise in biographical oral history ranging across Pearce's life from childhood (her

battles with what she describes as the religious 'crap' of school and her difficult relationship with her father) to the present day (a time of genuine personal contentment). This revealing and highly personal approach is far closer to the model of Dr Anthony Clare's famous BBC Radio 4 series *In the Psychiatrist's Chair* than it is to the more familiar format of the 'special features' interview.

While *Blake's 7* was being broadcast, Pearce remained the consummate BBC professional, dutifully appearing on children's television and playing the expected diplomatic, promotional role. But in the decades since, as the programme's original core audience has itself grown up, Pearce has become a less private and a more open figure. In *Call Me Jacks*, Pearce and Briggs explore stories from her life which range from the comical, through the unexpected and the bizarre, to the genuinely shocking. Although the tales are occasionally a little disorderly in the telling, Pearce remains a riveting storyteller throughout.

Pearce's own story is one that, were it a fictional biopic, any script editor would say strains at the limits of credibility. 'I never had a plan', she explains at one point. 'It never occurred to me to have a plan.' She has lived in the UK, the US and Africa, and worked as an actress, as a waitress in a strip club (from which she was fired), as an unofficial fan club secretary for Sammy Davis Jr, in a sanctuary for orphaned monkeys, and as an artists' life model. She promptly spent any monies she earned, and frequently had to rely on the generosity of friends to find places to live (spending several years in a one-room flat above a grocer's shop in St Ives, Cornwall). She's been married and separated several

times and is a cancer survivor twice over. One of the recurring experiences that Pearce has been commendably forthright about are her life-long struggles with mental health issues. She suffered her first nervous breakdown whilst still a student at RADA and has since endured ongoing battles with depression and other mental health conditions, which she has managed through a combination of medication and counselling.

After some early success in theatre and film, the role of Servalan became a career-defining one for Pearce. In an era when the spotlight of success in a high-profile TV role could render an actor 'typecast' and unemployable, she struggled to find sustained periods of work thereafter. She suggests that her own behaviour, as well as health issues, made the post-Blake's 7 period that much harder. 'I managed to sabotage my career quite spectacularly', she suggests – particularly during those times when, she says, she collapsed the distinctions between her own identity and that of Servalan.

The naturalism and simplicity of this Big Finish production (the sense of two colleagues in conversation) helps give the listener a sense of 'being in the room' with them. When the pair uncork a bottle of champagne and fill their glasses ('conversations of this intimacy require alcohol', Pearce explains) that sense of unforced and honest discussion only increases. With its robust language and very personal reflections on sex, religion, and mental well-being, *Call Me Jacks* is unquestionably a release for adults only. Blake's 7 fans should be made aware that Pearce's time on the show comprises only a relatively short (albeit very interesting) section of the interview. However, no prospective purchaser should worry that the often serious subject matter makes for sombre listening. This is frequently hilarious (Pearce's impossibly deep laugh is itself infectious), often surprisingly moving and never less than completely entertaining – even as your jaw drops yet again at what you're hearing.

What shines through here is Pearce's impressive personal resilience: her ability to survive, to bounce back, to recalibrate and to move on; even as, time and again, life has thrown the most difficult challenges at her. She describes herself as currently enjoying a renaissance, and it's great to see her thriving once again, enjoying, amongst other things, the opportunity to revisit the role of Servalan (and to take on fresh dramatic roles) in the audio realm. Blake's 7 enthusiasts will be pleased to learn that Big Finish are also planning to release an audio book version of Paul Darrow's celebrated autobiography *You're Him, Aren't You?*, but the appeal of Jacqueline Pearce's revealing reflections on a 'difficult life well lived' deserves a wider audience still. *Call Me Jacks* is absorbing, compelling listening.

RICH CROSS

★★★★★★★★★★ 9

MOVIES & TV



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THE STARBURST
GUIDE TO THE LATEST
SOUNDTRACKS
BY NICK SPACEK



year's **Scanners** and **The Brood** split LP will continue. Additionally, the obi for **Robinson Crusoe on Mars** teases **Planet of the Apes**. Given that **Robinson Crusoe** is an older film, and Mondo has been working on Jerry Goldsmith releases for quite a while - including **Poltergeist** and **Jurassic Park** - I think we can safely assume it's not Danny Elfman's score for 2001's Tim Burton remake.

Of course, the label used the Internet to clue folks into their upcoming **The Monster Squad** 7-inch release, which features Michael Sembello's inimitable **Rock Until You Drop**, as well as **Monster Squad Rap** on the B-side. Bruce Broughton's full score is due out this fall, but also still available on compact disc from La-La Land, who released it last autumn.

A more modern release, and less in the realm of hoping and guessing is the score by composer Marc Streitenfeld for **Prometheus**. It's officially out now, having been released on 'Alien Day', April 26th. It's available in both engineer white vinyl with grey splatter, as well as black, both as 45rpm 180-gram double LPs. Mondo also reissued its **Aliens** score by Howard Shore as a very limited edition of 75, featuring clear vinyl filled with alien blood liquid. It was \$225, and still managed to sell out in minutes, if not seconds. If you still haven't snagged a copy (and you should, as it sounds terrific), it's also available on black vinyl.

If you haven't heard the second **Lost Themes** record from John Carpenter on Sacred Bones, you're missing out. We'd argue that it's almost superior to the original, due to the fact that the trio of Carpenter, his son Cody, and Daniel Davies were able to record together and had more time to work on this, it just turned out to have a much better, well-rounded feeling to it. The trio also took time to re-



If you're going to get someone to compose the score for your crazy fantasy film, who better than **Game of Thrones** composer Ramin Djawadi? So it goes for **Warcraft**, the film adaptation of the long-running fantasy video game series. Same for your crazy sequel to a live-action adaptation of a Disney animated feature: who do you get for **The Huntsman: Winter's War** but James Newton Howard? Both epic fantasy scores are out now from Back Lot Music.

We didn't have a chance to get our ears into the Henry Jackman score for **Captain America: Civil War**, as film and score both saw release after our deadline, but initial reports from advance screenings indicate it's pretty similar to Jackman's work for **Winter Soldier**, but by no means the most notable part of what's supposed to be the culmination of the Marvel Cinematic Universe to this point. And, honestly, if you're most excited by the score in a film that features Spider-Man, that's an absolute shame - even for soundtrack nerds such as ourselves.

Lakeshore Records has a few genre scores you might want to take a listen to, as well. Nima Fakhrara's score to the final film on which Wes Craven worked (albeit only in a production role), **The Girl in the Photographs**, is a far more subtle and creepy work than the film, which is an absolutely shrill - yet boring - mess. The same goes for Wojciech Golczewski's score to the sci-fi odyssey **400 Days**, which manages to be straightforward and intense, whereas the film is confusing and obtuse.

The best way to get an idea of what Mondo will be releasing is a great analog analogy to their vinyl product. While the company's been pretty good at teasing their upcoming product via the usual social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and (especially) Instagram, the Austin-based label has also been using the obi strips to clue you in to what they have on the horizon. Cases in point: the obi for **The Invitation** teases **Crash** and **Naked Lunch**, meaning the Howard Shore/David Cronenberg releases that started with last



record versions of Carpenter's best known themes for a pair of split 12-inch disco singles for Sacred Bones. Available now are the pairings of **Halloween** and **Escape from New York**, as well as **Assault on Precinct 13** and **The Fog**. They're available in myriad versions. Check around and you can find black vinyl, digital, and picture disc versions of both.

Brookvale Records' vinyl reissue of the **From Dusk Till Dawn** soundtrack was due out on Record Store Day last month, but there were some test pressing issues that led to it getting delayed, which might actually be for the best. Given that some Record Store Day exclusives have a tendency to disappear rather quickly, the ability to order it directly from the label might make it a little easier to snag a copy. The edition of 5500 on clear with



blood splatter vinyl should start shipping about the time you're reading this.

Those who have seen the 1999 documentary **American Movie** will be intimately familiar with the independent horror film **Coven**, directed by Mark Borchardt. Then again, when your indie horror flick was introduced to people by an indie documentary, it's still a pretty underground thing. Thus, it's unsurprising that it's taken nearly two decades for Patrick Nettesheim's score to see a release. Thankfully, Forever Midnight has released the score on vinyl. It comes with a huge poster and digital download, and the first 500 copies include a download of the original **Coven** short film.

If you haven't seen **Green Room**, the latest film from **Blue Ruin** director Jeremy Saulnier, you're missing out on a blast of a



thriller. The score from the Blair brothers, Brooke and Will, is just as intense and uncomfortable. The pairing of their score with the music of the film's punk rock protagonists, the Ain't Rights, as well as music from hardcore and metal acts like **Midnight** and **Battleorn**, make this one of the more intriguing musical collections to be released in a good long while. It's out now digitally and on compact disc from Milan Records.

We spoke with the composers, and they explained that the score was created and composed from an array of feedback turned instrumentation. Instruments varied, but included the likes of a xylophone. We had to ask: how do you make a xylophone feedback?

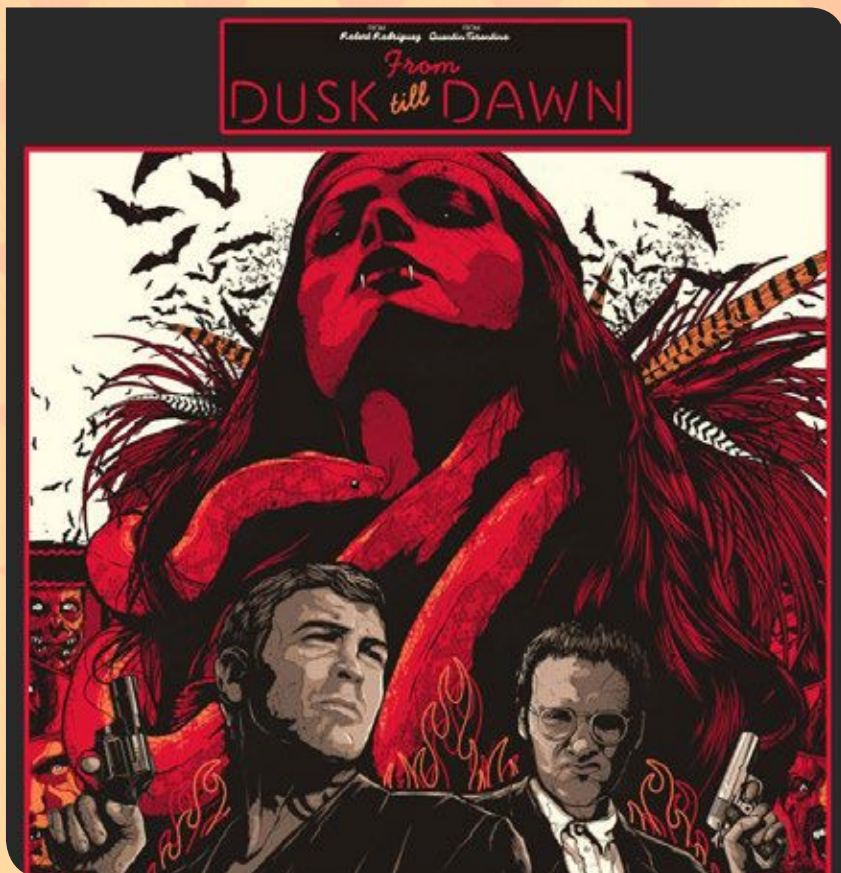
"It's like hyper-mic'ing or over-mic'ing something in a way that an engineer or a soundman in a club would, of course, try to avoid," explained Will Blair. "You're trained to avoid this, but it's as simple as turning up the microphones really loud, on the verge of feeding back, and as soon as a sound comes through it, it creates an over-active loop, resulting in sort of squealing feedback."

The pair then turned these feedback sounds into a set of instruments, with which they composed the score. The score you can purchase is remarkably similar to, but there are differences.

"Some of these would go on for five or six minutes, non-stop, within the movie itself, and we realised it would maybe be more impactful to get them down to three or four minutes," Will continued. "It's not music inspired by the movie, but music from the movie with an emphasis on a somewhat reasonable listening experience – or as reasonable as it can be, when it's really just a lot of feedback."

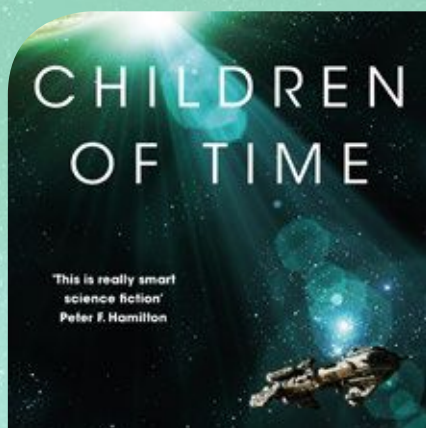
Will's brother Brooke agreed, and concluded that the music the Blairs composed for **Green Room** wasn't meant to be the focus, despite its high quality and understated approach.

"We're trying to be more invisible, you know, while still trying to push the story along and keep the tension at a certain level," Brooke finishes. "There are a couple of minutes where it does get fairly big in scope, but it never really takes over the film. It's always kind of meant to be underneath everything."



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Hugo Awards Disrupted. Again.

Not a year goes by without some sort of controversy surrounding the Hugo Awards. For the second year running, the Sad Puppy and Rabid Puppy movements have exploited weaknesses in the system to change the nature of the nominations. Nominees now include the likes of **Space Raptor Butt Invasion** by Chuck Tingle and **My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic: The Cutie Map**. The Sad Puppies are disrupting the Hugos because they wish to see a narrower, more commercial selection of nominees. The Rabid Puppies are organised by Theodore Beale, an online commentator who repackages bland, mainstream, and American-centred right wing views as something controversial and rebellious. He has used his platform to get much of his own work nominated for Hugo Awards. Rules changes will be enacted for 2017's Hugo Awards. The 2016 Hugo Awards will be presented on the evening of Saturday, August 20th at a ceremony at MidAmeriCon II, the 74th World Science Fiction Convention.

Tingle Responds to Hugo Nomination with New Book

Comedy Erotic fiction writer Chuck Tingle has responded to his Hugo Award nomination by thanking his fans and then producing yet another book. **Slammed in the Butt by My Hugo Award Nomination** is a homoerotic novel featuring a sentient Hugo Award called Kelpo. The highly prolific Chuck Tingle is a pseudonym, though his identity has not been made available to the public.



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Tchaikovsky Nominated for Clarke Award

Children of Time, by STARBURST favourite Adrian Tchaikovsky, is amongst the six books published in 2015 that have been shortlisted for the Arthur C. Clarke Award.

Now in its thirtieth year, the Arthur C. Clarke Award for science fiction literature released the list at the opening ceremony of the Sci-Fi London Film Festival. The shortlist is made up of the following titles: **The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet** by Becky Chambers (published by Hodder & Stoughton), **Europe at Midnight**, Dave Hutchinson (Solaris), **The Book of Phoenix**, Nnedi Okorafor (Hodder & Stoughton), **Arcadia**, Iain Pears (Faber & Faber), **Way Down Dark**, J. P. Smythe (Hodder & Stoughton), and Adrian Tchaikovsky's **Children of Time** (Tor).

The Clarke Awards are highly regarded as the 'go to' list for recommended reads, and this year's selection is no different, being filled with some of STARBURST's favourite books from last year. We wish all the contestants the best of luck.

Terry Pratchett's Legacy to be Honoured with New Projects

New works, including a biography of Terry Pratchett written by his personal assistant Rob Wilkins, a graphic novel and a **Discworld** Encyclopedia, have been announced.

The graphic novel will be an adaptation of **Small Gods** with artwork by Ray Friesen. There will also be two adaptations from novel to screen. Neil Gaiman is to write a TV version of **Good Omens**, the book he co-wrote with Pratchett. **Pirates of the Caribbean** writer Terry Rossio is currently working on a screenplay based on the book **Mort**. Finally, **The Wee Free Men** is also being adapted for the screen by Pratchett's daughter, Rhianna Pratchett, with further details expected to be revealed at San Diego Comic-Con.

New Harry Potter Books on their Way

J.K. Rowling's screenplay of **Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them** is due to come out on November 18th, at the same time as the movie of the same name. The adaptation of the stage play **Harry Potter and the Cursed Child** will be out next year.

Bloomsbury published the original **Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them** in 2001 as part of a fundraiser for the charity Comic Relief. However, this new work is an "entirely new story". The book will also be available electronically on the website Pottermore.

Potterheads will be pleased to know that the stage play script for the 'eighth story' in the Harry Potter series – **Harry Potter and the Cursed Child Parts I and II** is set to be released on 31st July this summer to coincide with the first performance at the Palace Theatre in London. The play, written by Rowling, is set 19 years after events of the seventh book.

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY now in Folio Edition

Hardcore book fans will be familiar with the Folio Society's output of beautifully crafted books designed to look really pretty on the shelf and enhance the reading experience. They have recently released the first ever illustrated edition of **2001: A Space Odyssey**. Featuring an introduction by Michael Moorcock and art by Joe Wilson, it remains every bit the ambitious and prophetic work today as it was when it was first published in 1968.

COMING SOON



SMOKE

AUTHOR: DAN VYLETA
PUBLISHER: WEIDENFELD & NICOLSON
RELEASE DATE: JULY 7TH

English-speaking audiences have a strange sort of hunger for modern fantasy adventures set in boarding schools and **Smoke** intends to fill that hole. It's set in a Victorian England with one crucial difference – sin is visible. Feelings of anger, greed, lust, and passion cause a thin plume of smoke to rise from your collar or the corner of your mouth and stain your clothes. It divides the rich and powerful from the poor and subjugated. The wealthy go to expensive schools where they learn to control their smoke and live 'clean' lives. When two boys uncover a terrible truth, things get interesting.



THE RACE

AUTHOR: NINA ALLAN
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: JULY 19TH

Titan has been doing this very interesting thing recently where they reprint small-press books you probably missed the first time around and can't get your hands on now. Award-winning author Nina Allan's **The Race** first came out in 2014 and quickly went out of print. This odd novel is about genetically engineered racing hounds and the disappearance of a child; both things that change the lives of people across many different worlds.



DISHONORED - THE CORRODED MAN

AUTHOR: ADAM CHRISTOPHER
PUBLISHER: TITAN
RELEASE DATE: SEPT 27TH

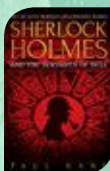
We are digging Adam Christopher's tie-in work at the moment; we loved his stuff for **Elementary** and his current run on the comic book **The Shield** is also pretty interesting. **The Corroded Man** picks up where the video game **Dishonored** left off, continuing the adventures of Corvo Attano, protecting and training his daughter, Emily, who is now the Empress of Isles and living in Dunwall, not to mention becoming increasingly more adventurous herself. The official link between the current **Dishonored** game and the next one, it's essential reading for fans of the series.



STAR WARS - AFTERMATH: LIFE DEBT

AUTHOR: CHUCK WENDIG
PUBLISHER: CENTURY
RELEASE DATE: JULY 12TH

Following the death of the Emperor, the Empire is falling. For Han Solo, that means settling his last outstanding debt, by helping liberate Chewbacca's home, Kashyyyk. We got a little preview of this in Wendig's last **Star Wars** novel, **Aftermath**, but now it looks like it's all about the Wookiees. We expect to see the rag-tag heroes from **Aftermath** in this as well; ace pilot Norra Wexley and chums, including the horrible slaying machine that is Mister Bones. Sounds fantastic. Though if you have opinions about the way Disney have rebooted the **Star Wars** novels, feel free to write in and let us know.



SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE SERVANTS OF HELL

AUTHOR: PAUL KANE
PUBLISHER: SOLARIS
RELEASE DATE: JUL 14TH

Sherlock Holmes versus Cenobites? Frankly, we've had this one on order for months and we can't wait. Clive Barker has given Paul Kane permission to do this and frankly it sounds perfect to us. Kane's pulpy, adventure horror style sounds like a perfect fit for this sort of thing. Holmes and Watson will take on the mysterious society known as 'The Order of the Gash'. As more people go AWOL in a similar manner, the signs point to an ominous asylum in France and to the underworld of London. Will Holmes solve the mysterious puzzle box? You'll have to read it to find out.



DROWNED WORLDS

EDITOR: JONATHAN STRAHAN
PUBLISHER: SOLARIS
RELEASE DATE: JULY 14TH

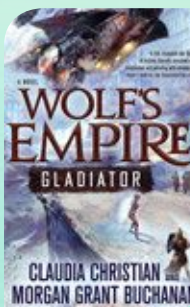
Solaris has always put together some amazing collections and this is no different. Bringing together the likes of Kim Stanley Robinson, Ken Liu, Paul McAuley, Kathleen Ann Goonan, Charlie Jane Anders, and Lavie Tidhar to tell topical tales of ecological disaster. This latest one brings together sci-fi stories of a great and modern flood - where one thing is wiped away, another rises in its place. There has always been romance and adventure in the streets of a drowned London or on gorgeous sailing cities spanning a submerged world, sleek ships exploring as land gets ever rarer. Sounds great!



IN THE SHADOW OF FRANKENSTEIN: TALES OF THE MODERN PROMETHEUS

EDITOR: STEPHEN JONES
PUBLISHER: PEGASUS BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: JULY 5TH

There are two types of people in the world: those who pedantically point out that Frankenstein is the name of the doctor who made the monster, and those who realise that the real monster is Doctor Frankenstein. In **In the Shadow of Frankenstein: Tales of the Modern Prometheus** brings together both types of story to create a thrilling anthology. Despite the fact that they've splashed Neil Gaiman's name on the cover of this collection (he's written a foreword), the real draw here is horror editor Stephen Jones, who never fails to deliver a great collection.



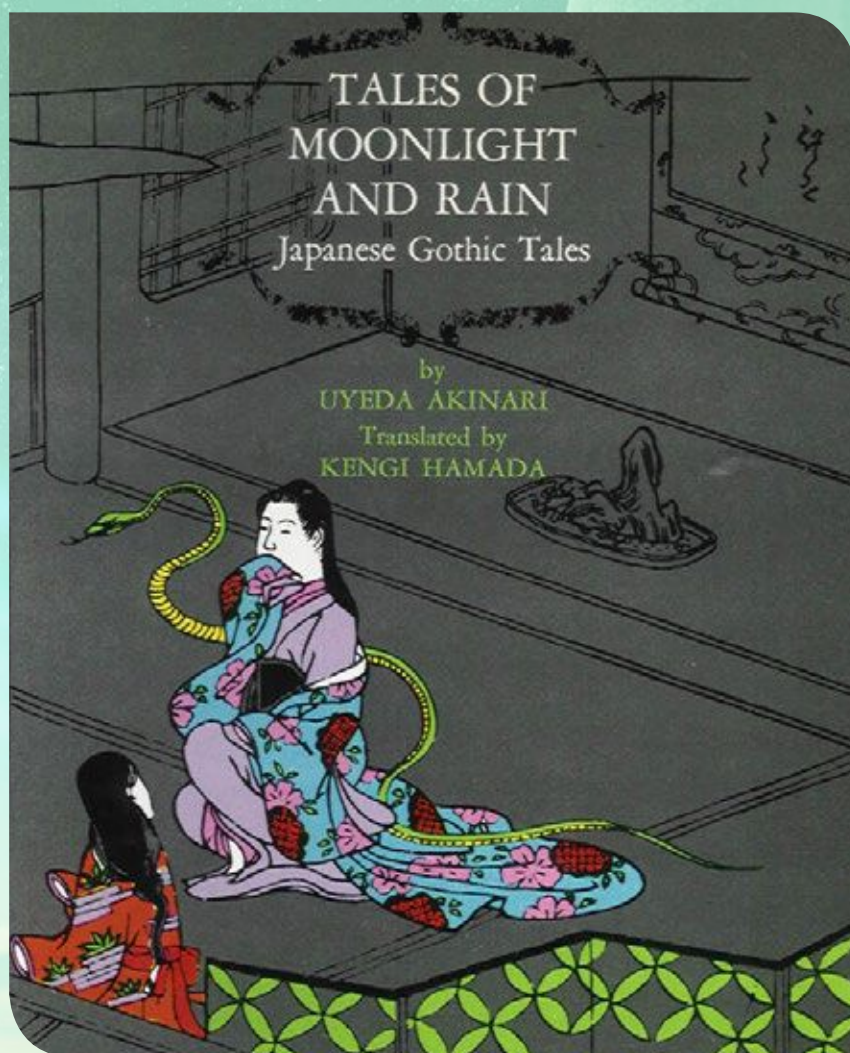
WOLF'S EMPIRE: GLADIATOR

AUTHORS: C CHRISTIAN & M GRANT BUCHANAN
PUBLISHER: TOR BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: JULY 13TH

Claudia Christian is perhaps better known for **Babylon 5**, but this new book sounds fascinating. It's basically **Gladiator** meets **Star Wars**. When noblewoman Accala Viridius's mother and brother are slain, she demands vengeance. But a galactic civil war is tearing the empire apart, and no one steps up to help her get revenge. Accala then gives up her life of privilege and position to become a fighter. If that doesn't excite you, we suspect nothing will.

BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK
OF GENRE FICTION
BY KATE FATHERS



If you trace the roots of Japanese horror, they will eventually lead you to Ueda Akinari. Before the eighteenth century, ghost stories were considered 'unliterary'. It's a stance genre fans are familiar with even today: sci-fi, fantasy, and horror are good for pure entertainment, but you're not supposed to expect much from them. They are never complex. They do not comment on the state of our world or the human condition. They are, in the art world, unimportant. Enter Ueda Akinari...

In 1776, he published *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* (or *Ugetsu monogatari*), a collection of ghost stories adapted from old Chinese tales. There are nine stories in the collection, ranging from calm discussions with spirits to intense battles with a snake demon, and

in them we're able to see early examples of staple Japanese horror tropes. As in western horror, Japanese horror has its own pet narrative structures, and through Ueda's work we can see that those structures stretch back at least 240 years. Fans of J-horror (either in print or on film) will be familiar with them: there's the vengeful ghost and the familial connection with the supernatural; ghosts created because they've been wronged in life and protagonists only realising they've been visiting with ghosts at the end of the tale. Women also feature largely in Japanese horror, either as protagonist or as supernatural creature, and that focus began with Ueda. Being able to see the very beginnings of works like *Ringu* and *One Missed Call* is fascinating, as is the depth

to each tale. Because Ueda hasn't just written entertaining ghost stories, he's given us morality plays.

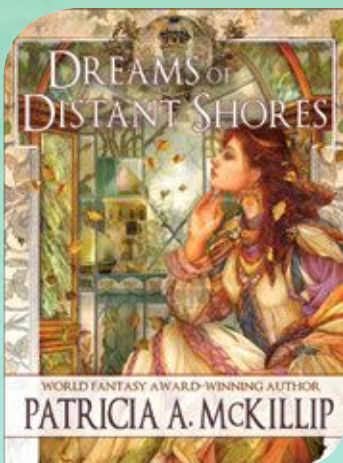
Just like in modern Japanese horror, the supernatural in *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* largely occurs as a result of human action. Bad behaviour, Ueda tells us, has consequences, and those consequences often manifest as ghosts or demons. In 'The Reed-Choked House', a man abandons his wife. In 'The Kibitsu Cauldron', a married man runs off with a prostitute. Both are visited by ghosts who seek some kind of reparation. I'm not sure what values were being promoted in Japan at the time, but Ueda is certainly telling his readers what values he thinks are important. Fidelity, respect, following through on your promises, hard work - these are all things Ueda uses his horror stories to teach us, and you can see shades of these teachings in modern horror. It's likely that by attaching moral lessons, Ueda was able to elevate the ghost story for his 18th Century audience. After *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*, ghost stories were acceptable pieces of fiction. And it's because of that shift that we now have Japanese horror as we know it.

As for the text itself, *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* has been translated numerous times, most recently by Anthony H. Chambers for the 2007 Columbia University Press edition. Chambers' translation is excellent. The prose is clean, clear and surprisingly modern, given the work that came out of eighteenth century Europe. The stories, as I've said before, also run the gamut between a subtle application of the supernatural ('On Poverty and Wealth', where the supernatural is used as a vehicle to debate ideas) and overt horror that is what we modern audiences expect (the bloody 'The Kibitsu Cauldron' and the creepy 'A Serpent's Lust'). The only quibble I have is with the layout. Each story in the 2007 edition is preceded by pages of background notes and followed by even more pages of endnotes. Perhaps I'm just too used to the structure of Penguin Classics, but I would have consolidated those notes either at the beginning or end of the book. They are informative, but personally I'd rather see what I can get from the text on my own before I involve someone else's thoughts.

Fans of Japanese horror will love Ueda Akinari's *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*. The stories may be short, but they're absorbing and beautifully written and a fascinating piece of genre history. You couldn't find a more perfect introduction to the world of Japanese horror than this. Parts of *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* have also been adapted into various films, the most famous being Kenji Mizoguchi's classic 1958 film *Ugetsu*. ✦

THE LATEST RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



DREAMS OF DISTANT SHORES

**AUTHOR: PATRICIA A. MCKILLIP /
PUBLISHER: TACHYON PUBLICATIONS /
RELEASE DATE: MAY 26TH**

Two lovers are imprisoned in a bathroom, and as the woman tells the man increasingly strange tales about her life, something ghastly pounds on the walls and door, hungry to get inside... a witch finds herself

imprisoned inside the body of a wooden mermaid, and then the mermaid comes to life... an artist, desperate to find a Muse, paints a beautiful mouth that promptly begins to speak to him and tells him she is a Gorgon... a witch struggles to understand her new familiar, and her familiar struggles to warn the witch about a nasty impending danger... some alien abductions are not all they seem... and when her boyfriend is seduced by the goddess of the sea, a young woman must risk her soul to venture beneath the waves and rescue him...

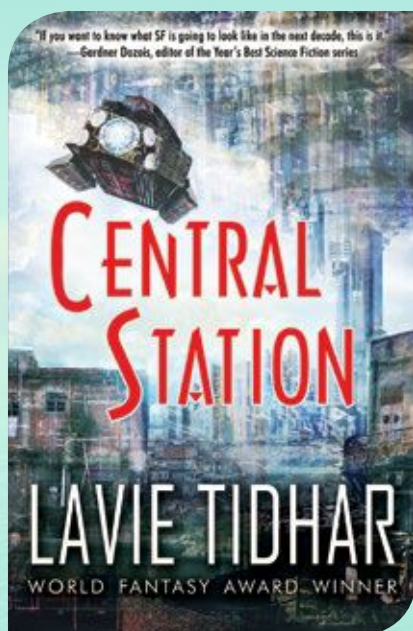
These (and more) are the stories included in *Dreams of Distant Shores*, a beautiful collection of new writing from award-winning fantasy author Patricia A. McKillip. Although she is still probably best known for her Riddle-Master trilogy, McKillip has been a fantasy-writing tour de force for more than forty years, and whether you are new to her work or a long-time devotee, it will be impossible not to be enchanted by the offerings in this volume. McKillip has that rare gift – she not only knows how to tell a wonderful story and, within just a few brief sentences, make you immediately comfortable with her characters and their universe. She also knows how to keep the reader on their toes

and throw in some surprises you will never see coming. But, better than any of that, she writes like a dream in the kind of lyrical, stream-of-consciousness style that lures you in and won't let go, making you look at the world you thought you knew in fresh new ways that don't seem possible (after you've read *Something Rich and Strange*, you'll never see a trip to the beach in quite the same way ever again).

Funny, thrilling, revelatory and heartbreaking, there isn't one weak story in this selection, although if we were forced to choose our favourites they would be *The Gorgon* in the Cupboard, *Which Witch*, and *Something Rich and Strange*, which is more a novella than a short story. But hold on, *Mer* is fantastic and what about *Edith* and *Henry Go Motoring*... and you can't forget *Alien*? You see what we mean? And, at the back of the book, McKillip shares some of her thoughts about writing high fantasy, which is a great bonus (although way too brief!). Absolutely spellbinding. It has been a very long time since we read a gathering of short stories as perfect and beguiling as these.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★★★★★★ 10



CENTRAL STATION

AUTHOR: LAVIE TIDHAR / PUBLISHER: TACHYON PUBLICATIONS / RELEASE DATE: MAY 26TH

Rising high above Tel Aviv, Central Station is a giant spaceport and gateway to the stars. On the ground level, humans rub shoulders with androids and the mysterious 'Others', connected by a digital consciousness that stretches to the asteroid belt and beyond. This collection of short stories by Lavie Tidhar tells of these people and beings, each tale offering a different perspective from the characters, showing how they interact with one another and their place in the city they inhabit.

Tidhar's prose draws the reader in, bringing this world to life with ease. There are many concepts on offer – ranging from genetic modification to artificial intelligence – yet the characters are never sacrificed in favour of the technology; in fact, the two of them combine seamlessly to create a unique vision, one that will leave the reader thinking long after the final page. Not only intelligent, it's emotional too, telling of loves lost and those only just begun, of those wishing to escape their past and those hoping to bring it back.

All but a couple of these stories have already seen print in sci-fi magazines over the last five years, but they have been substantially altered to fit the course of

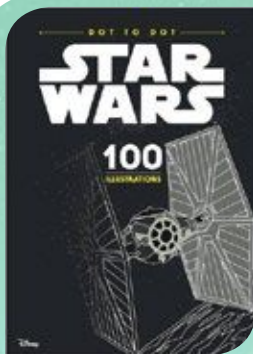
the narrative, linking all together to form a cohesive whole. Each is of an incredibly high standard, and readers will take time to savour every word and relish the structure of every sentence. Tidhar is reminiscent of an early William Gibson, not just in sharing that short and punchy style, but in his ability to create a world where the speculation is believable enough to fit seamlessly into the narrative; somehow, despite being set centuries into the future, it feels just around the corner.

Tidhar's last two books, *The Violent Century* and *A Man Lies Dreaming*, were rightly given great acclaim, so were always going to be tough acts to follow. *Central Station* maintains that standard, cementing Lavie Tidhar as one of science fiction's great voices, an author who creates scenarios and characters that feel destined to become classics, ones that readers will be happy to revisit time and time again. It's a compelling collection that mixes the epic and the intimate, one that succeeds at being profound, incredibly moving and, quite simply, stunning.

ALISTER DAVISON

★★★★★★★★★★ 10

STARBURST



STAR WARS: DOT TO DOT

PUBLISHER: EGMONT
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

You might look at this on an online book retailer and think 'yeah, that's one to keep the kids quiet at the weekend'. If you're in an actual shop, you might be raising an eyebrow at the size and thickness of the book. You might even notice that the illustration on the front cover includes dots numbered in the high 700s.

This book contains 100 illustrations from the worlds of Star Wars. This is a complex, yet ultimately satisfying set of challenges. You may very well not have any clue as to what many of the illustrations are until you are a significant way through them, although a

few are obvious before you've committed to joining any dots whatsoever. The dot sequences go to very high numbers, and there may be more than one set of dots in any particular illustration – these are colour coded so you know which set you're supposed to be working on at any time, but we do wonder whether this might be problematic if you're colour blind? Certainly, the dots and their numbers are very small, and we recommend excellent lighting to avoid errors.

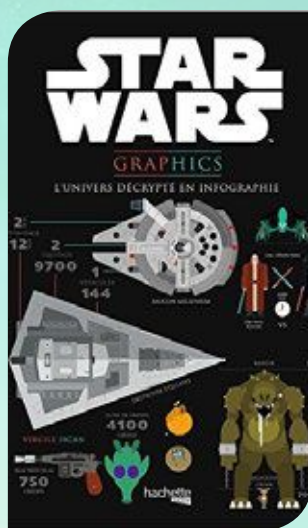
There are hours upon hours of fun here, and if you're on the bandwagon of adult colouring books, the 'instructions'

do suggest that you could colour in the illustrations after you've completed them. There's also an 'Answers' section at the back of the book if you've managed to completely confuse yourself. We recommend a pencil with a decent eraser to hand, in case of errors, because you'll be gutted if you commit a mistake in ink and ruin the picture.

This then, is not a Dot to Dot for your kids, rather it is exactly the relaxing activity you have been looking for.

ANNE DAVIES

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



STAR WARS: GRAPHICS

AUTHOR: VIRGILE ISCAN
PUBLISHER: EGMONT
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Genre fans have long rejoiced in arguing over impossible questions: who is tougher, Hulk or Superman? Which is quicker, the Millennium Falcon or the Starship Enterprise? This is because we love a good statistic, but the problem with statistics is that they are very dull to look at.

Fortunately, there is an ongoing fad where our favourite tidbits and facts from the franchises that we love so much are being produced and laid out in a fun format that makes them a little bit more digestible: the infographic book. This is where an author has researched the topic at hand in depth and produced these facts alongside crude art that signifies what is being dissected. It may include specifically coloured pie charts or comparison drawings to make things easier on the eye.

The latest of these books covers both the original and prequel trilogies from the Star

Wars universe and is pretty extensive. It covers such varied topics as the fastest space vessels or pod-racers, and individual heights of key characters. Ever wondered how many kisses there were in all six episodes? This has got you covered. Have you ever pondered how expensive it would be to hire the Cantina band for a wedding? Sorted (it's 3,000 credits by the way). We are even shown exactly how much Han Solo owed Jabba the Hutt, with the debts incurred broken down individually.

There are some very interesting bits of information in here, including all shooting locations in the real world for the six films and an exact layout of the Cantina bar, but there are also some pretty pointless facts laid out, as well as some hard to understand infographics too, as there are some acronyms and abbreviations that only a true hardcore fan would

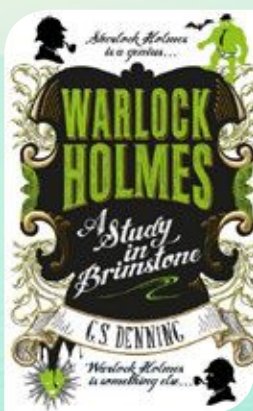
understand easily.

On the whole, this is more fun than annoying, but you can't help but feel it would have been better to separate the two trilogies into different volumes and then really delve down into the intricacies of each set of three films. Sometimes it feels like the information on show is just skimming the surface – no more so than when it only uses two pages to break down how many lines of dialogue each character has in the two trilogies, yet misses out major characters like Princess Leia, Luke Skywalker and C-3PO, while including Jar Jar Binks.

But, we can forgive minor issues like this because it does offer a heck of a lot of information. The Force is fairly strong in this one.

J.D. GILLAM

★★★★★★★★★★ 7



WARLOCK HOLMES: A STUDY IN BRIMSTONE

AUTHOR: G. S. DENNING
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: MAY 27TH

Some ideas are so obvious and clever that you wonder why it's taken the world so long to come up with them. Warlock Holmes: A Study in Brimstone is one such idea, taking the world of Sherlock Holmes and rather than making the central character an incredibly astute detective, turning him into a wizard.

G. S. Denning has taken a bundle of classic Holmes tales and rewritten them based on this simple premise. Warlock, unlike Sherlock, is a brilliant wizard filled with arcane might and ability. Alas, his focus on matters arcane and powerful have also meant that he's not really focused on the real world. The result is that Watson is the true detective, using his skills and perception as an army doctor to fill in the gaps

on the cases. Meanwhile, Warlock uses his supernatural powers to navigate the choppy waters of the criminal underworld, in a world where unnatural creatures are lurking in every corner.

Of course, this is all still set in Victorian London. Most good subjects of the Empire know that magic isn't real, so happily look the other way when confronted by were-rat urchins and the like. Inspector Lestrade is a vampire, and Inspector Torg Grogsson is literally an ogre. The rest of Scotland Yard don't like them or Holmes, so that hasn't changed.

Warlock Holmes: A Study in Brimstone is clever and funny supernatural silliness. Dennings has twisted and warped Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's world, to make it strange and sinisterly

magical, and yet he's somehow managed to preserve the core charm of the original stories. Watson is still as brave and loyal as he always was, and Warlock is every bit the genius Sherlock is, all be it in an entirely different way and with more buffoonery. The cases themselves work well as stories in their own right, though each one is also a parody of sorts of the original stories. In a market filled with Sherlock-style reworkings, this stands out as clever and well done. If you ever wondered how much better Sherlock would be if people could hurl hellfire at each other, well this one is for you.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



THE END OF THE WORLD RUNNING CLUB

PUBLISHER: DEL RAY / AUTHOR: ADRIAN J. WALKER / RELEASE DATE: JUNE 2ND

It seems quite likely that Adrian J. Walker's bookshelves boast more than their fair share of titles by the likes of John Wyndham, John Christopher, H.G. Wells and pretty much any number of other authors given to chronicling possible nightmare Armageddon scenarios. Although *The End of the World Running Club* is modern, grim,

gritty and sometimes uncomfortable, it's not difficult to trace its lineage back to the so-called 'cosy catastrophe' authors who brought the civilised world to its knees back in the 1950s and 1960s in books like *A Wrinkle in the Skin* and *The Day of the Triffids*.

This time it's asteroids. The Earth is bombarded by thousands of tiny – and not so tiny – bits of space flotsam and jetsam, Edgar Hill, an out-of-shape thirty-something, disappointing husband and could-do-better father, is as unprepared as the rest of humanity for the chaos and carnage of life on a planet changed unrecognisably by its collision with tons of fast-moving cosmic debris. But at least he's quick enough to understand the importance of the warning sirens and the panic of his neighbours as he bundles his family into the cellar of their Edinburgh home, waiting to sit out the apocalypse. They're rescued before their resources can run dry and they find themselves in a paramilitary encampment in the shattered remains of the city; but Edgar is off on a foraging expedition when a fleet of helicopters arrive and whisk off the survivors – including his family – down to the South Coast for evacuation to a more habitable Europe. Torn from the family he's discovered he does, after all, adore and cherish, Edgar and an ill-matched bunch of fellow refugees have no choice but to traverse the dangerous, ravaged landscape. With the road network devastated they have to do it on foot. By running...

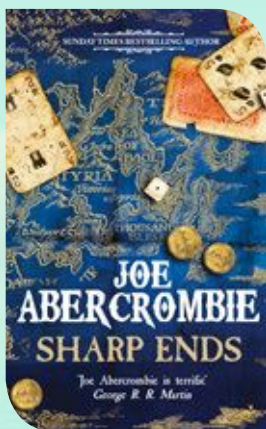
The first hundred or so pages of *The End of the World Running Club* – the apocalypse itself and how Edgar and

his family survive it – are thrillingly page-turning. But as any long-distance runner will tell you, it's hard to keep up that pace. Walker's breathless narrative slows down, finds its rhythm and settles into an enjoyably restless canter as Edgar slowly but surely steps up to the plate and becomes the man he would never have become if his world hadn't come crashing down around him.

Walker's brisk, absorbing text takes the raw clichés of the apocalyptic subgenre and injects them with a modern grit and vigour. Life in the new ruined world is tough, ugly and cheap. Edgar and his companions – uneasy bedfellows at first but eventually forged by the fires of experience into a ferociously determined and close-knit unit – encounter numerous dangers on their harrowing journey across the shattered country, from trigger-happy rural survivalists to a community in the ruins of Manchester living in the shadow of a terrifying despot who rules with an iron fist (any resemblance to *STARBURST HQ* is entirely coincidental). *The End of the World Running Club* will thrill and delight fans who might have thought that no-one was writing books like this anymore – it's all zombie pandemics around these parts nowadays – and whilst the 'running club' conceit never really takes root and the narrative loses its focus a little in its rush towards its commendably downbeat conclusion, it remains a terrifically well-observed, haunting and occasionally harrowing read. Now jog on...

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★ 8



SHARP ENDS: TALES FROM THE WORLD OF THE FIRST LAW

AUTHOR: JOE ABERCROMBIE
PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Fresh from the success of his *Shattered Seas* trilogy, Joe Abercrombie has returned to the world of the *First Law*

series with *Sharp Ends*, a collection of thirteen short stories. Some have seen print before – either in anthologies or as extras at the back of novels – but more than half are new to this volume.

It's fair to say that Abercrombie took the fantasy genre by storm ten years ago with his debut *The Blade Itself*, and the tone of that and his future work would become core texts of the Grimdark subgenre. Reading that book a decade ago sent a thrill through many readers of fantasy, who sensed something special was in the making, and *Sharp Ends* brings back that sense of wonder. The first story centres on someone who features heavily in *The First Law* series, as does the last, and is saved from being self-indulgent by Abercrombie's dark wit. It's fascinating to see these two characters from the eyes of others – whether they be admired or downright terrified – giving further depth to his creations.

Two newer characters – Javre and Shev – form the spine of this collection, featuring in five of the stories. By setting the tales in chronological order (except the very last, for reasons which do become apparent), *Sharp Ends* charts the relationship between this fighter and thief duo. They're great; a pair of women that bring laughs, disaster, betrayal and bloodshed aplenty, along with the intimate moments that Abercrombie can do so well.

There might not be much sorcery in the stories, but there's magic in Abercrombie's way with words; his prose borders on the poetic and he has an uncanny gift of being able to put the reader right in the characters' heads, even in stories where the point of view switches multiple times. However powerful or incompetent, these are people with hopes and dreams, not all of them fulfilled, some of them not quite what they

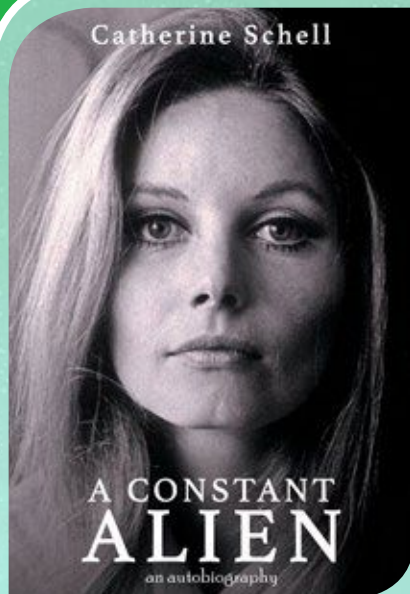
expected and disappointing. Yet, the deeper the darkness, the stronger the light; there is hope, in the form of friendship, honour and trust. They may be rare commodities here, but that makes them more precious and worth the sacrifices, some of which may find even the most hardened readers having to wipe away a stray tear.

The consistently high standard of the stories in *Sharp Ends* makes it a triumph. Granted, readers would be advised to acquaint themselves with their setting first, but anyone who was excited by Abercrombie ten years ago will feel those butterflies again. It's a masterful approach, displaying everything that's great about the short story format, from a writer at the height of his powers.

ALISTER DAVISON

★★★★★★★★★★ 10

Catherine Schell



A CONSTANT ALIEN

AUTHOR: CATHERINE SCHELL / PUBLISHER:
FANTOM FILMS BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Catherine Schell is probably best known in cult circles for her role as shape-shifting alien Maya in the second season of Gerry Anderson's *Space: 1999* and as the urbane Countess Scarlioni in 1979's *City of Death*, one of the best and most acclaimed serials of the 'classic' Doctor Who era. But her career spans decades of appearances in dozens of classic British TV series and starring roles in glamorous, big-budget feature films alongside the likes of Peter Sellers (who became a trusted confidante). Yet it's her life away from the camera which makes her autobiography, *A Constant Alien* (the title a reference not only to her role as Maya but also to her slightly restless, bohemian lifestyle) such a terrific, engrossing read; showbiz memories and anecdotes nestle

alongside a laid-bare, warts and all life story in which fact is very often much stranger – and much more interesting – than fiction.

Born of aristocratic Hungarian stock as Katherine Frelin Schell von Baushlott (she settled upon her stage-name after a considerable compromise), Catherine's childhood was nothing if not traumatic. The Nazis requisitioned her parents' estate at the start of World War II and the family fled to Austria where they lived in virtual poverty until 1948 before emigrating to the United States in 1950, where her father acquired American citizenship. Later in the 1950s, the family returned to Europe and in Germany, Catherine became interested in acting and started to develop her skills in the Otto Falckenberg School of the Performing Arts.

It's these early chapters of *A Constant Alien*, in which Catherine details the cold realities and privations of her early life, which really set the tone for her rivetingly-honest story. It's a story about family and relationships, many of them forged in the fires of war and its aftermath, and the determination of a fearless, naive young girl determined to make her own way in a monstrously chauvinistic and single-minded (if not simple-minded) industry. Catherine's prose is beautifully vivid and evocative and often unflinchingly-honest. It's funny, too; her recollections of her first screen appearance in schlocky 1964 German-language adventure film *Lana: Queen of the Amazon* (shot on location, an experience she was lucky to survive) are hilarious because the circumstance of the film's making is unthinkable in today's health-and-safety first environment. But we're there, up close and personal, with Catherine as her career starts to pick up steam and by the end of the 1960's she'd joined that elite band of performers known as 'The Bond Girls' with her appearance in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (she even had some dialogue!) and by 1975 she was staying in opulent

French hotels and rubbing shoulders with Peter Sellers as she co-starred in *The Return of the Pink Panther*.

Fans of *Space: 1999* and *Doctor Who* looking for behind-the-scenes secrets and salacious gossip will find slim pickings here – she has nothing but fond memories of the former and knew next to nothing about the latter so had no real preconceptions – and as her career progresses throughout the 1970s her personal life becomes more and more chaotic, her tempestuous and often violent relationship with actor William Marlowe, followed by unashamed flings with some quite well-known and extremely married co-stars. Eventually, she found happiness and contentment with director Bill Lyons but by the end of the 1980s, the industry having changed over the years, the work dried up for both of them and they eventually decided to 'up sticks' and move to France where they ran a small guesthouse together until Bill's death in 2006.

Catherine now lives in contented retirement in France and her story – warm and witty, engaging and relentlessly honest – is the chronicle of an actress whose dedication to her craft, as she admits towards the end of the book "did not go deep enough." It's also a story full of life, love and passion – her devotion to her parents in their declining years is heartbreaking stuff – dotted with the occasional indiscretion, told with a real sense of joy and with absolutely no regrets for what might have been. Catherine Schell may be best remembered for her roles in *Space: 1999* and *Doctor Who* but *A Constant Alien* tells the story of a life which amounted to so much more. An unforgettable and oddly life-affirming autobiography; recommended unreservedly.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★★★★★★10



NEBULA AWARDS SHOWCASE

AUTHOR: VARIOUS
EDITED BY: MERCEDES LACKEY
PUBLISHER: PYR
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The introduction to this year's Nebula Awards Showcase states, nay warns, the reader that when gathering material for the sci-fi/fantasy anthology, one of the book's key aspects is including the type of fiction that makes the audience think, but not necessarily be liked. Throughout the epic sagas included in this hefty volume, that much rings true. It's a pleasure to discover then that there's still plenty to like about this collection of the weird and the wonderful.

2016's Nebula Awards Showcase allows twenty authors to run riot as they craft tales of adventure, death, romance, mystery and more, all in the head-spinning

settings that speculative fiction brings. In true anthology fashion, each story here will intrigue just about every type of reader, but that in itself brings the feeling of disorientation. The Nebula Awards Showcase doesn't read like a conventional collection of sci-fi/fantasy fiction – it isn't meant to. We jump from mechanically-inclined science fiction to mermaid-themed fantasy in the blink of a page, skipping merrily across a diverse array of genre-twisting creativity.

However, there you have the biggest selling point of the Nebula Awards Showcase 2016 in a nutshell. Every story is in a league of its own in terms of style and consistency, meaning

that any sense of fatigue as we journey from world to world isn't felt at all. It's hard also to feel overwhelmed at the wide variety of fiction here, when this book is tailor-made for dipping in and out of.

The Nebula Awards Showcase 2016 most definitely lives up to its promise of making you think. It's ingenious, frustrating, spell-binding, imaginative, and sometimes even all too brief with its individual stories, but the one thing it isn't is boring. A potent collection that's more than worthy of residing on your bookshelf.

FRED MCNAMARA

★★★★★★★★★★★★8



CRASHING HEAVEN

AUTHOR: AL ROBERTSON
PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Al Robertson's debut novel is a disturbing yet engrossing vision of a cyberpunk-flavoured future, full of sordid characters and bleak emotions, wrapped up in a desolate tale of murder and treachery. *Crashing Heaven* follows Jack Forster, a former fighter for the Pantheon, a cluster of sentient corporations formerly at war with the rogue AI's of the Totality. Now that the war has ended, Jack is keen to uncover the truth behind the death of his lover, even if it means stirring up old grudges from both sides. Armed with his menacing AI puppet Hugo Fist, Jack has just weeks to find out the truth before Fist is able to

claim Jack's body for himself, killing Jack in the process.

Robertson has pieced together a book not without humour, but still a fairly morose read that strikes a deft balance between crafting a true sense of the horrific world Jack is lost in with the character-driven nature of the story itself. Within those characters are the darkest of emotions, and Robertson wrenches them out, engulfing *Crashing Heaven* with an atmosphere that's drenched in an inescapable darkness, but makes for riveting reading.

Through all of its confident execution and engaging narrative, *Crashing Heaven* has

a desperate feel to it. It feels that way because its story has such a finely crafted feel to it, and yet the nagging reminder of Jack's impending doom casts an effective downpour on the book, making it all the more fun to read. *Crashing Heaven* takes familiar concepts and blasts fresh life into them, but it's a life that paints a vivid picture of the deadlly underbelly of war and love. A spellbindingly rugged addition to cyberpunk and science fiction literature in general.

FRED MCNAMARA

★★★★★★★★★★ 10



MASKS AND SHADOWS

AUTHOR: STEPHANIE BURGIS
PUBLISHER: PYR
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It is 1779. Recently widowed Charlotte von Steinbeck has just arrived at the Eszterhaza Palace, where her sister Sophie is Prince Nikolaus mistress. Among the other visitors are the famous

castrato singer Carlo Morelli, Edmund Guernsey - a supposedly English gentleman who might possibly be a Prussian spy - and the mysterious alchemist Ignaz von Born. Events move swiftly. While Charlotte finds herself romantically drawn towards the castrato, two of the actors in the palace's opera company are found horribly murdered and a mysterious smoke-like creature roams the corridors. Charlotte's maid is recruited by the opera's Kapellmeister, the renowned composer Joseph Haydn, to replace one of the dead singers, while another one of the company is recruited into a secret society whose dark-robed members seem to be both everywhere and nowhere. And then there is the matter of the second alchemist Count Radamowsky, who performs a terrifying séance that none

of them will forget. All these elements combine into a devious plot driven by black magic and political intrigue - Charlotte and Carlo must penetrate the masks worn by seemingly everyone, if they are to prevent an assassination that could change the course of countless lives.

Masks and Shadows is YA author Stephanie Burgis' adult debut and although it isn't completely successful, it is a hugely entertaining work of fiction, weaving real-life historical characters and locations into an engrossing and richly embroidered supernaturally enhanced stew. Burgis' descriptions of the opera and the powers of music are especially compelling (if you never wanted to listen to opera, this book may well change your mind) and she juggles a vast cast of characters extremely well while keeping the

tension high.

It's an intricate story but Burgis' never bogs the reader down in unnecessary detail, which is quite a trick considering how much historical and alchemical ground she has to cover. The only real disappointments are the climax, which feels a little bolted-on and winds everything up rather too quickly, and the tentative attraction between Charlotte and Carlo which doesn't really convince. Burgis' prose might also be too blushingly romantic for some tastes, although this may be a stylist choice that works well considering the time period she's writing about. All in all, a terrific book that you'll have trouble putting down.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



ALT.SHERLOCK. HOLMES

AUTHORS: J.WYMAN, G.MEHN, G.KOCH
PUBLISHER: ABADDON
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Even after nearly 130 years, the well of new Sherlock Holmes stories that need to be told refuses to run dry. This is surely due to the flexibility of the character and the inventive directions that fans-turned-writers find to take him

in. Take *Alt. Sherlock. Holmes*, for example, an anthology collecting three novellas that dare to uproot the Great Detective from his familiar Victorian/Edwardian surroundings and deposit him in different locations and periods of American history.

Jamie Wyman's 'The Case of the Tattooed Bride' casts Holmes as a carnie in 1930s Indiana, one who aids the Pinkerton Detective Agency in solving their most inexplicable crimes. Wyman has a lot of fun reinventing the wheel, and the notion of Sherlock as a circus sideshow attraction is certainly a neat and enticing idea.

'A Study in Starlets' by Gini Koch sports a switcheroo you would really expect to be more common than it is; Sherlock Holmes as a woman. The female Holmes is possibly the standout revamp of the detective

in the anthology - she's a vibrant character all on her own, possessing a love for reality television and a James Bond-like Aston Martin. The modern American setting and the gender-swapping could be reminiscent of the TV series *Elementary*, but Koch, thankfully, spins it in a different direction.

It's Glen Mehn's 'The Power of the Media' that offers the most eye-raising alternative view of the world of Sherlock Holmes, however, as it is set in the drug-addled New York of the 1960s. While the idea of Holmes as a user is nothing new, reading about how respectable old Dr Watson turned into Walter White (*Breaking Bad*) is pretty startling.

Though each presents an original, well-told mystery, the most enjoyable aspect of these novellas is noticing all

the references to usual Holmes lore and seeing how they have been skewed to fit into a new context. It is also a nice touch to have each story preluded by an account of how these alternate Holmeses and Watsons met. Because no matter how much the detective is changed, he must always have his Boswell.

It is a testament to Conan Doyle's creations that the core elements of the characters and their stories can endure even after undergoing such radical reinvention. As such, this anthology is definitely worth a read for any Holmes fan that thinks something like Sherlock doesn't push the character far enough out of his comfort zone.

CHRISTIAN BONE

★★★★★★★★★★ 7



INTERVIEW - CATHERINE SCHELL

We join Catherine Schell, fondly remembered for her role as Maya in Gerry Anderson's 1970s sci-fi saga *SPACE: 1999*, to talk about her life and career and her recently published candid autobiography *A CONSTANT ALIEN*...

Born in Hungary in 1944 of aristocratic stock as Katherina Freiin Schell von Bauschlott, the early life of Catherine Schell is more extraordinary than the fiction of any of the dozens of film and TV credits she amassed in a career which spanned thirty years. Her family was forced to flee from Hungary when the Nazis confiscated their estates; they then lived in Austria and the United States for a while before moving to Germany in 1957. Here, the young Katherina first developed an interest in acting, a career which would see her domiciled in the United Kingdom where she became known as Catherine Schell. It's easy to see why, her connection to *Space: 1999* aside, Catherine's autobiography is entitled *A Constant Alien*.

"If you think about the journey of my life, starting in Europe, to America, ending up in England and nowadays my life in France, it's not that I felt like an alien, it's that I actually was an alien," recalls Catherine. "It's about knowing that you're different, you like being where you are but you know you don't really belong there. My experiences when I was younger made me strong and unconsciously willing to accept something different. I was never frightened of leaving one country and going to the next."

Settled back in Europe in the early 1960s, one of Catherine's first screen appearances, now aged 22 and credited as Catharine von Schell, was in the

German-language exploitation adventure movie *Lana: Queen of the Amazons* alongside Anton Diffring. Catherine's tales of her treatment by the film's crew is one of her book's most remarkable highlights – and it was nearly enough to make her question her decision to become an actress. "We actually filmed in the Amazon," she remembers, "and on one occasion, I was abandoned on a snake-infested island. Another time, I was made to cross rivers full of piranhas and alligators. I did all my own stunts and I was left on the Amazon during a rainstorm and my canoe was sinking. But I was very young, I wasn't that experienced but I thought 'If this is what it's all about, I don't like it' and apart from Anton, I didn't like my fellow actors. I'd not been used to such crude language and filthy jokes, but I came to England shortly afterwards to do a film called *Traitor's Gate* and suddenly, it was more like I imagined it'd be. Nobody's a saint in the business but at least we know how to speak and behave with each other. I learned a lot from the *Lana* experience and I never went through such a bad time afterwards."

Once settled in the UK, Catherine began to win roles in numerous feature films and TV productions. 1969 saw her indoctrination into the acting elite known as 'the Bond girl' when she appeared as Nancy, one of archvillain Blofeld's 'Angels of Death', in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* starring

the much-maligned George Lazenby. "It was my introduction to quite a glamorous world," says Catherine. "The girls and I [other 'Angels' included Anoushka Hempel, Julie Ege, and Joanna Lumley] got on really well, we were well looked after and the location was spectacular. But it wasn't really very taxing. I didn't think of it as a 'big break'. I knew that Bond was enormous but although it wasn't a very big part I had to say lines. I spent a night with James Bond in his room but I didn't really think it was going to be that important or that I would be noticed. But I was asked to work quite a lot thereafter."

OHMSS is now regarded as one of the best of the series, but Lazenby himself hasn't been similarly rehabilitated – his co-star Diana Rigg remains frosty about her working relationship with the short-lived new Bond. "I think he has to be given some credit for following Sean Connery in such a popular series and a lot of people think it's the best one because it humanises Bond," says Catherine. "George wasn't an actor, he was a model so he didn't really know how to act and how to behave. He didn't know about film and set etiquette and he was a bit crude but I've met him since at a convention and he was charming, quite sweet."

Throughout the 1970s, Catherine starred in countless TV series and films including *The Return of the Pink Panther* (1975) alongside the legendarily troubled Peter Sellers. "Peter was lovely to work with; we enjoyed a platonic relationship long after the filming had ended and he would ring up late in the night and ask me to come over because he was so depressed and had to have someone to talk to. I'd go over and there'd be this litany of complaints and regrets but I just sat and listened and when he finished he felt better and I'd go back home! I suspect he was bi-polar; he should possibly have taken medication because he plummeted to the depths and then he flew when he was hyper, so I think there was a problem there."

1976 saw Catherine join the cast of the revamped second season of Gerry Anderson's *Space: 1999* as shape-shifting Maya. "It was a very happy group," she recalls. "Of course, Martin Landau and Barbara Bain were the stars and they were delightful. Eventually, once we all got to know each other, we spent a lot of time together socially and Martin and I got along brilliantly,

we had a similar sense of humour so we did a lot of laughing. It was a wonderful year; the crew were fantastic and it was a joy to go to work. We took it seriously and we couldn't send anything up. There were quite good scripts but there was one with living rocks, which I couldn't help laughing at even though the writer probably thought it was a good idea when he wrote it."

A proposed Maya spin-off never happened, but Catherine returned to the world of cult sci-fi when the Doctor came calling in 1979. Catherine appeared as the sophisticated Countess Scarlioni in the classic *Doctor Who* serial *City of Death* starring Tom Baker. Catherine had no idea what to expect of the experience. "I had nothing to compare it to because I didn't know *Doctor Who*. I'd caught half an episode here and there when I'd visit friends and their kids were watching, so I knew about it but if you don't watch a programme you can't make comparisons. As far as I was concerned, it was a very good script directed by Michael Hayes and with Julian Glover in the cast. Tom Baker was very dishevelled, his shirt could have spent some time in the washing machine, but he was all right on set, very boisterous, he spoke very loudly and was very full of himself, but we had no arguments. I had no idea that it was ever going to be that popular. I've never seen it and I might take a look at it if you say it's really very good!"

Work began to dry up in the 1980s for Catherine and her partner – director Bill Hays – so the couple sold up and moved to France where, until Bill's death in 2006, they ran a very popular guest house in Bonneval. Today, living a quiet life in France socialising with friends, painting, writing and looking after her animals, Catherine has no regrets about her career. "I was once told that I would have to completely concentrate only on my career and every decision had to do with my career and my acting and I did not do that. I was very fortunate to be offered work but I still had my private loves and I did not eat, drink and sleep acting and I don't regret it at all and I can't blame anybody but me. My career was how I earned my living but it was not something I was completely passionate about. It wasn't a religion for me, it was simply a job."

PAUL MOUNT

***A CONSTANT ALIEN* is available now from Fantom Film Books.**

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VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

JOEL HARLEY PULLS MONITOR DUTY TO BRING YOU THE LATEST FROM THE WORLD OF COMIC BOOKS



CIVIL WAR II

CHOOSING SIDES I



cinema - that feels my life has peaked a little bit.

Onwards and upwards though, and into another month's instalment of **View From the Watchtower**, in which we desperately seek something to keep ourselves busy until *Justice League* or *Infinity War*, or the Punisher Netflix series. Well, now that you mention it, a Judge Dredd/Aliens/Predator crossover would do the job. Pretty please, 2000 AD?

But first: in a busy month/year/lifetime for Marvel, the comic book division cracks on with business as usual, throwing their everything into *Civil War II* and the return of Steve Rogers as Captain America to tie into MCU business. We have since learned, in subsequent months since my reporting of *Civil War II* being a thing, that the controversial factor getting our heroes to fight is the question of whether superheroes should be able to stop their enemies *before* any crimes are committed - *Minority Report*-style. And, rather than it being Cap vs. Iron Man again, that it will this time be Captain Marvel pit against ol' Shellhead. It remains to be seen whether the latter will emerge as a giant asshole again, or whether it'll be a more nuanced portrayal (as per the cinematic version).

Elsewhere, and over at DC Comics, their *Rebirth* gets redesigns for Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman. The question on everyone's lips: will we see the return of the red trunks? The answer to which, sadly, seems to be no. DC has released images of the restyles of Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Aquaman, Green Lantern, Super Sons (a baby Robin and Superboy) and, um, Harley Quinn and Killer Croc. This gets you a cheerier-looking Superman wearing a darker uniform (more navy than ultramarine, and the red boots are all but gone). Batman gets an upgraded bat emblem and black utility belt - plus dodgy triangles everywhere - and there's a nifty cape for Wonder Woman. Aquaman gets fishy flared trousers (We like them), Killer Croc a pair of cargo shorts and... juggalo trousers, and a beret for Harley Quinn. None of this is re-inventing the wheel, but it's far from the worst thing Jim Lee or DC have ever done to a set of characters or their wardrobes *cough, Scooby Apocalypse, cough*. And it's far, far, far, far from the worst outfitting we've seen for Harley Quinn *cough, Arkham Asylum/City/Knight, cough*.

A question burning in my mind, as I sit, digesting a screening of *Captain America: Civil War*. Where do we go from here? It's only five months into 2016, but there's a sense of the year having, well, peaked. Hear

me out: *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (yes, it's a stupid title - let it go already!), *Daredevil* Season Two and *Civil War* over and done with. Now what?! Never mind the year - there's a part of me - as a fan of comic book



DC and AMC have teamed up for a special reprint of *Preacher* #1, with updated covers depicting the characters using their new TV likenesses. Unlike the original *Preacher* run, however, Glenn Fabry is nowhere to be seen (Lord knows what he would have made of his Johnny Depp lookalike Jesse Custer being turned into milquetoast Dominic Cooper), with interior artist Steve Dillon providing the new cover work. It's a fun idea though, which also does away with the case of 'same face' we tend to find in so much of Dillon's work these days – the characters actually look like their to-be TV counterparts rather than slightly more or less angry variations on his Frank Castle. The book is said to be a freebie, presumably in time to coincide with the release of TV *Preacher*.

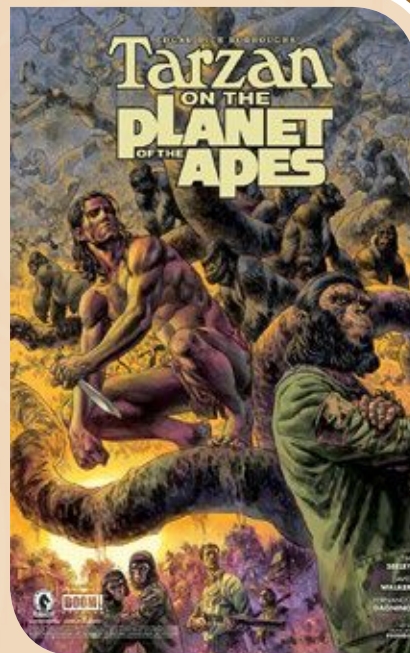
Away from the big(ger) presses, we see Doctor Who gearing up to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Cybermen with a crossover. The special event, titled *Supremacy of the Cybermen*, will see Doctors Nine (Christopher Eccleston), Ten (David Tennant), Eleven (Matt Smith), and Twelve (Peter Capaldi) – plus both comic book and TV show companions (including Billie Piper's Rose and John Barrowman's Captain Jack) unite to fight the Cybermen menace after Rassilon is kidnapped by the metal monsters. The five-part series will begin on July 6th, written by George Mann and Cavan Scott, and illustrated by Alessandro Vitti.

It's an extra sociable month for our comic book character friends. As if the thought of four Doctors sharing one TARDIS (give or take, across several time zones) wasn't enough, Dark Horse are giving us a typically great-sounding Judge Dredd crossover. The lawman of the future has already crossed paths with both the *Aliens* and *Predator* franchises in his past, but *Predator vs Judge*



Dredd vs Aliens will pit old stoney face against both threats at once. Still only gets second billing, though. The story will have Judge Dredd and Psi Judge Anderson chasing a criminal cult across the Cursed Earth – where they run into a mad scientist, bloodthirsty Predator and vicious, drooling Xenomorphs. *Predator vs. Judge Dredd vs. Aliens* will hit stores in July 2016.

Normally, the thought of Judge Dredd fighting Aliens and Predator all at the same time would be enough to finish up this column on a hell of a high note. This month, however, gets us the news of *Tarzan on the Planet of the Apes*. Neither franchise is a stranger to the world of comic book crossovers (*Tarzan vs. Predator* is a thing that exists, after



all) but this is their first together. Dark Horse will publish *Tarzan on the Planet of the Apes* in conjunction with BOOM! Studios, with Tarzan reunited with ape mate Caesar on the Planet of the Apes... somehow. Time travel shenanigans, perhaps? Find out how on September 28th, when Issue #1 (of 5) hits the stands. For once, I don't actually fancy the damn dirty apes' chances.

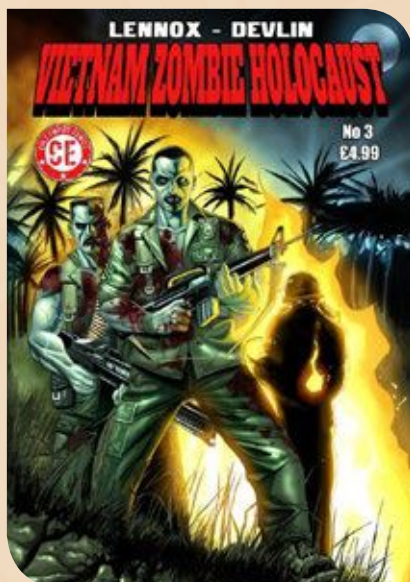
And so, again, we wrap up another month's *View from the Watchtower*, stuffed full of crossover news, and feeling a little better about the rest of the year. If in doubt, add a little Predator. ✦

Joel Harley can be contacted at: joel.harley@starburstmagazine.com and tweeted @joelharley



REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC
BOOK RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



VIETNAM ZOMBIE HOLOCAUST #3

WRITER: GEORGE LENNOX / ARTIST: JAMES DEVLIN / PUBLISHER: CULT EMPIRE COMICS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The war rages on in one of the most magnificently and least subtly named comics to emerge in recent years. The most demented of mad scientists has created a platoon of undead soldiers and unleashed them into the verdant combat zone, giving the horrors of war a whole new meaning. As the jungles of Vietnam become increasingly overrun with zombies, both human and animal, the fight for survival becomes a matter for all, not just the forces on either side of the conflict.

The zombie soldiers themselves get a bit of development this time, shown to be considerably smarter than you'd expect of undead grunts, and posing the question of what it is they want. The true extent of their creator Dr Herbert's insanity is revealed, and it doesn't just come from his warped scientific vision. His ruthlessness in protecting his creations makes you wonder if there's something larger at stake yet to be revealed. These gradual unveilings elevate the comic beyond the (nevertheless entertaining) trashy pulp horror its title invokes, imbuing it with a degree of narrative cohesion to supplement its full-colour fury. While many revelations utilise recognisable tropes of horror movies, it's all presented with such unrestrained histrionics that the

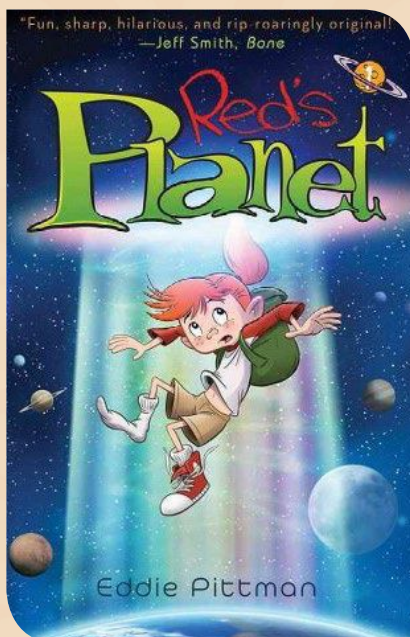
familiarity becomes part of the fun.

Speaking of filmic echoes, the comic's cinematic aesthetic has begun to gleefully escalate. Incorporated now are a few panels mimicking 3D-in-yr-face shots, such as a vertically bisected zombie head soaring towards the reader with its eyeballs popping out on stalks like a lovestruck Looney Tunes character, or death by electrocution shown up close in an incandescent blue explosion of electric fire.

To ramp up the madness even further, the final panel of issue 2 teased the introduction of Death Squad X, a trio of Vietcong assassins dressed like a hybrid of action movie ninjas and an X-Force splinter group. With the release of their deadly skills, a whole new variable has entered the arena, and one that could seemingly wipe out everyone else with comparatively little effort. While their appearance wasn't as significant or lengthy as was hoped, it unequivocally established their formidable badassery, and there's no doubt they'll be back to play a major part in the next issue's incendiary finale.

ANDREW MARSHALL

★★★★★★★★★ 8



RED'S PLANET

WRITER: EDDIE PITTMAN / PUBLISHER: ABRAMS BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Red's Planet is a new comic book series for children by Eddie Pittman, but also has plenty of humour and loveable characters to keep adults entertained as well. At over 190 pages long, this collection is printed in full colour, which makes this collection a treat.

The story focuses on the character Red, a ten-year old school girl who lives with a foster family but dreams of paradise. She is then mistakenly kidnapped by a UFO and a series of events leads her to an alien planet where the adventure really begins. Red is accompanied by a variety of alien characters, each with their own distinct characteristics. On her journey she comes across Tawee, a loveable and silent alien, who Red manages to form a friendly bond with. One of the most interesting and beloved characters in the series is Goose, who provides the comic relief throughout the story.

The plot of Red's Planet is well constructed and it is clear that Eddie Pittman has put a lot of time into developing the characters as well as the story, to ensure an enjoyable reading experience for many readers. The series is firmly placed in the sci-fi adventure genre, but there is also a hint of a coming of age tale, as the reader follows Red throughout her journey.

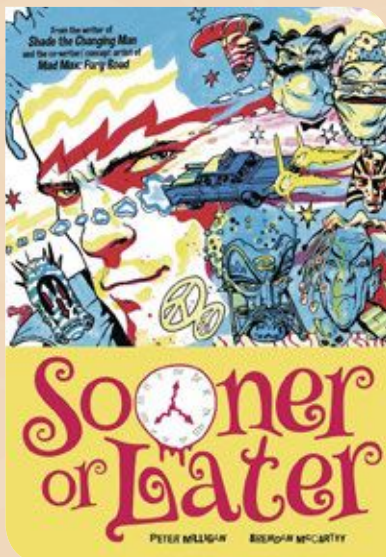
This comic series is a beautifully

illustrated and perfectly imagined story that will capture the imagination of many young readers. Although Red strongly holds the limelight in this series, the other characters are able to hold their own and provide a unique sense of humour. Adult readers may also appreciate some of the pop-culture related references, such as Star Trek, which creep up throughout the series. As a polite nod to sci-fi genre, it will give many readers an enjoyable adventure. A superb comic book series that is full of humour, loveable characters and an extraordinary adventure, a perfect read.

ANDREW MUSK

★★★★★★★★★ 10





SOONER OR LATER

WRITER & ARTIST: PETER MILLIGAN, BRENDAN MCCARTHY / PUBLISHER: 2000 AD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Created by Peter Milligan and Brendan McCarthy, *Sooner or Later* first graced the pages of 2000 AD in 1986. Surreal and psychedelic, it told the tale of Mickey Swift, an unemployed young man from Camden Town, who is whisked into the future and forced to find work for his passage back in time. Imagine Alice in Wonderland with the quirky visuals of *Yellow Submarine*, graced with the

colours that are the benefit of being on the back page.

Both creators saw that single page as an opportunity to go wild, and did so. Visually, it is stunning, almost primal in its colouring, with art that challenges the traditional comic form, inviting the eyes to dance around the page, rather than the usual across and down directions we associate with reading. These one-page episodes were like a shot of espresso, which was to their advantage in one respect, although it meant time spent with Mickey Swift was all too brief and frantic. That said, many of the images and characters created by McCarthy have lingered in the back of the mind for decades, and it has taken this collection to free them back into memory.

Collected, the story works extremely well; it's still as manic as ever, still reading like an acid trip Lewis Carroll would have been proud of, retaining the charm that made it such an eye-opener back in the day. Milligan's script is not only packed with puns – ranging from the wince-inducing to the poetic – but bitingly satirical, as Swift's travels help him not only find employment, but that sense of self and purpose the character deserves.

Added to this package is the sequel *Swift's Return*. Jamie Hewlett brings his own inimitable style to the story, which would serve him extremely well for *Tank Girl*, yet it feels initially incongruous here. Stark, despite its incredible detail, it takes a little time to acclimatise after the attention-grabbing

colours of the previous story, but once the eye adapts there is much to be taken from it.

Readers are also treated to a couple of *Future Shocks*, as well as insightful interviews with Milligan and McCarthy, which serve as reminders of the boundaries pushed by the duo over the years. Thirty years on, *Sooner or Later* remains frighteningly relevant to our times; there's a Mickey Swift within everyone, struggling against the system in search of a bright and hopeful future.

ALISTER DAVISON

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



JUDGE DREDD: THE COMPLETE CASE FILES #27

WRITER: JOHN WAGNER / ARTISTS: VARIOUS / PUBLISHER: 2000 AD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The *Complete Case Files #27* is slap-bang in the middle of Judge Dredd's career to date. Dredd's aging is synchronous with the comic, so you see the evolution of the character as a reflection of the creators' milieu. As our society trundles along, so does Dredd's.

The *Complete Case Files* shows us eras of the futuristic lawman's life in Mega City One. It's at once a clever parody and an awesome science fiction. And damn, there's so much of it.

Seventeen or eighteen years ago, it was 2120 for Dredd; *The Complete Case Files #27* stretches across the weekly 2000 AD from progs 1053 to 1083. It also includes stories from the *Judge Dredd Magazine* – most notably *Predator vs. Judge Dredd*. There are no epic, twenty-episode story-arcs here – these are short, digestible chunks. And they are all written by Dredd's creator, the great John Wagner.

There's a scandal involving fatties and an eating competition, a robotic Dr Frankenstein of sorts is stealing 'perfect' people to create the ultimate body, and Dredd is kidnapped by a deranged collector of interesting humans. Nothing is too strange for Dredd: even the en-masse, libidinous attack of sexbots – male and female – is simply another case. Mega City One, for all of its oddness, is compelling in its complexity. It's a striking portrayal of how the future might look, and it's not one to easily dismiss.

In this collection of stories, there are notable and resonant commentaries beside the tongue-in-cheek. Rights-trampling Justice Department surveillance, for example, is contrasted

by the Judges' role as protector. There are notions on the pervasive nonsense of fashion, while at the same time brutality permeates every strata of the city.

Violence and torment, apathy and nihilism are intertwined with the bizarre. One particular episode, involving the past Judge Child and City of the Damned storylines, reminds us of the horrors running across this backdrop. It's perfect and fertile ground for the *Predator*, who caps this collection with an awesome appearance.

Dredd lives in a world where councils convene over 'Peek-a-Boo' butt-less trousers. We are ever reminded that Mega City One endures in its futuristic eccentricity. It's a testament to Wagner's ability that the ideas keep flowing. On that note, the art represents the bountiful talent available to 2000 AD. Legendary names like Kevin Walker, Ian Gibson, Cliff Robinson, Greg Staples and John Burns grace these pages with their unique takes on Mega City One. Dredd may be centre stage, but these artists, along with John Wagner, have crafted an absorbing setting. The city is the true star here, and its essence could not be captured more exactly than in this collection.

BENJAMIN KAY

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



DOCTOR WHO: THE TENTH DOCTOR VOLUME 4 - THE ENDLESS SONG

WRITER: NICK ABADZIS / ARTISTS: ELEONORA CARLINI, ELENA CASAGRANDE, CLAUDIA IANNICIELLO, ARIANNA FLOREAN / PUBLISHER: TITAN COMICS / RELEASE DATE: 24TH MAY

How's this for The Last Song? The power of music is something that Doctor Who in a sense keeps returning to- witness the grand orchestral scope of Murray Gold's post-2005 vision for its soundtrack. In a way, The Last Song builds on that- a sentient music living aboard a vast gas giant its centrepiece.

The idea of such a powerful force serving as the antagonist is not new,

coincidentally enough having been slated to appear alongside the Tenth Doctor in an early treatment of what would become The Idiot's Lantern before the idea of an alien intelligence inhabiting a popular song during the first flowerings of rock & roll in the England of the Fifties was scrapped- a search for Sonic Doom will reveal Mark Gatiss's initial commission for Series Two from Russell T Davies, following the success of The Unquiet Dead....

Incidentally the song slated as the host for the proto-Wire intelligence was The Chordettes' Mr. Sandman, reused to eerie effect two regenerations later for the Doctor in Sleep No More! In that context it took on a life of its own, which in wider sense music itself does here. Of course even pre-Gold it took on a significance all its own, through the twiddlings of the Radiophonic Workshop, the inhabitants of Room Thirteen at the BBC's Television Centre tasked with developing ever new & innovative means to provide the Time Lord with constantly shifting soundscapes to explore.

And now it has artistic representation. Just one of the many reasons The Endless Song is worthy of praise. Of course, the idea of music as a living thing, permeating every strand of whichever universe it inhabits, is almost as old as the hills- see the harmony of the spheres, or musica universalis, for a little historical background. But here we see Doctor Who doing what Doctor Who has always done best in applying a little abstract logic to the everyday or familiar.

A sort of elective synaesthesia, if you will. And no less groovy for that (man) in much the same way Patrick Troughton's rapidly

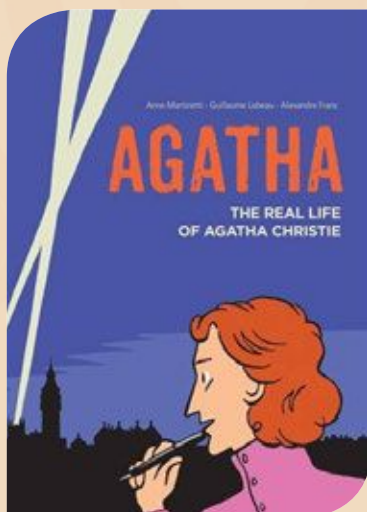
expanding head proved ideal psychedelic accompaniment to Delia Derbyshire's electronic handiwork, the little chap rocking a Beatle cut at just the right time with the Fab Four in the ascendancy as well as making the recorder his weapon of choice.

The dark side of the spoons then came with the Seventh Doctor a few bodies down the line.... then cometh New Who, cometh pop. Twenty years away when seen through the prism of war in The Empty Child/The Doctor Dances, listeners having to content themselves with some Glenn Miller & dancing as a metaphor for something rather more adult, a thread continued throughout The Girl In The Fireplace.

Here, though, we can simply turn on, tune in & drop out into another world entirely with the freedom to switch on our own inner Workshop & improvise. For sheer scope of imagination & grasp of philosophy, The Endless Song deserves to run & run...

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

★★★★★★★★★ 9



AGATHA: THE REAL LIFE OF AGATHA CHRISTIE

WRITER: ANNE MARTINETTI, GUILLAUME LEBEAU / ARTIST: ALEXANDRE FRANC / PUBLISHER: SELFMADEHERO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The December 1926 disappearance of Agatha Christie created intense interest, and when she was discovered, staying under an assumed name in a Harrogate Hotel, the rumour mill went into meltdown. Christie herself refused to ever be drawn out about

what happened during those missing days. Attempts to provide an answer have been many and varied, to the point where even Doctor Who has tried. The blurb for this book suggests that answers, or at least a hypothesis, are to be forthcoming from the pages of this graphic novel. Alas, they are not. What this graphic novel in fact is however is a highly abbreviated biography of Christie's eighty-five year life.

The artwork is good; solid drawing and inking skills are on display from Alexandre Franc, and the episodes of Christie's life, which Martinetti and Lebeau have chosen to focus on, are well presented and realised. There is much attention given in the artwork to fine background details, which easily evoke a sense of time and place, as we see the twentieth century progress as Christie's tale unfolds.

This is very much 'Christie 101': there is nothing here that the Christie-ophile, or enthusiastic reader of Wikipedia, will not be aware of already. Indeed, the realities of Christie's two marriages are perhaps glossed over, to portray matters as much more simplistic, and favourable to Christie, than they perhaps were. Christie is never portrayed as anything less than the 'Queen of Crime' she came to be considered.

The oft-repeated tale that Christie grew to hate, Hercule Poirot, is re-worked to great effect, with the grey-celled Belgian detective appearing frequently in the narrative as a

figment of Christie's imagination for her to converse with and to advance her thoughts. By the end of her life, she's been arguing with him for well over forty years, and he does not take her plans to kill him off well. With Poirot's demise comes the end of Christie's life, and the end of this Graphic Novel. We would recommend this to the Agatha Christie fan, the reader of Golden Era Detective Fiction who can't get enough of discovering more about the real life of one of that movement's most popular authors, or anyone who wants a fantastically quick illustrated tour through the life of the best-selling novelist of all time.

ANNE DAVIES

★★★★★★★★★ 7



A MONTHLY
ROUND UP FROM
THE WORLD OF ANIME
AND MANGA FROM
LITTLEANIMEBLOG.COM'S
DOMINIC CUTHBERT

ANIME-NATION



Hisao Okawa, NADIA scriptwriter, passes away aged 88

Hisao Okawa, the scriptwriter of little known treasure **Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water**, has passed away aged 88 as a result of respiratory failure. Born in Kanagawa, Okawa he studied his craft under Ryūzō Kikushima, who is known for co-writing screenplays for several Akira Kurosawa films. Besides either writing or co-writing all 39 episodes of *Nadia*, he worked on 14 episodes and the 1979 film of the **Heidi, Girl of the Alps** anime, and 11 episodes of **Fables of the Green Forest**. He also penned scripts for **Shōnen Tokugawa Ieyasu**, and certain episodes of **Ikkyū-san**.

Brotherhood Goes Live-Action in New FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST Movie

A live-action film adaptation of Hiromu Arakawa's **Fullmetal Alchemist** manga is now undergoing fusion with a Japanese release set for 2017. Directed by Fumiko Sohori (**Ashita no Joe**) and starring Ryosuke Yamada as Edward Elric, filming takes place in Italy between June and August of this year. The first half of the film will stay faithful to the story in Arakawa's original manga, but the second half will follow an original story.

SHŌWA GENROKU RAKUGO SHINJŪ's Next Generation to Take the Stage

The next season of historical anime **Shōwa Genroku Rakugo Shinjū** is in production, with the title **Shōwa Genroku Rakugo Shinjū: Sukeroku Futatabi-hen (Sukeroku Anew Arc)**. The story is set to step forward into the modern era and Akira Ishida and Kōichi Yamadera will be reprising their respective roles as Kikuhiko and Sukeroku.

Encore for SOUND! EUPHONIUM with Fall Release Confirmed

It's been months since the confirmation that Kyoto Animation's **Sound! Euphonium** was gearing up for a second season, and now the series' official website has set an October 2016 air date. The news was unveiled in a post-credit sting at the April premiere of the anime's compilation movie, with the official website promising further details in the future.

CARDCAPTOR SAKURA Sequel to Celebrate Manga's 20th Anniversary

As the **Cardcaptor Sakura** manga celebrates its 20th anniversary this month, Kodansha's Nakayoshi magazine is starting a shiny new sequel. Clamp, the manga's original creative team, is reuniting for the series beginning June 3rd, which takes place after Sakura Kinomoto graduates from Tomoeda Elementary School. As she starts junior high, she has a strange dream and is launched into a whole new adventure for the next generation of fans to discover.

Third series for A CERTAIN MAGICAL INDEX?

Producer and former **Dengeki Bunko** Editor-in-Chief, Kazuma Miki, has teased his Twitter followers that a new season of **A Certain Magical Index** might well be in the works. His post read: 'Please understand that this is an unofficial statement. I am always receiving everyone's passionate opinions on this. **Index** anime [Season Three] is plausible, so please wait!!!'

ALITA: BATTLE ANGEL Live-Action Movie Tries Out Three Actors for Lead Role

The James Cameron and John Landau-produced live-action movie adaptation planned for Yukito Kishiro's **Battle Angel Alita** manga has narrowed down its possible leads to three actors. Maika Monroe of **It Follows** and **Independence Day: Resurgence**, Rosa Salazar of **The Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials**, and Zendaya of **Spider-Man: Homecoming** are all being tested for the role of Alita, with a final decision expected soon. Although **Shutter Island**'s Laeta Kalogridis has penned a script, the film has yet to be green-lit, as 20th Century Fox is negotiating its budget down from the \$175-200 million mark.

First Image Released of Scarlett Johansson in DreamWorks' GHOST IN THE SHELL

A first look at ScarJo as our favourite cyborg law enforcer has been unveiled by Paramount and DreamWorks Pictures, sparking new controversy over whitewashing. The latest synopsis refers to her only as 'the Major', adding fresh fuel to the fire. Both studios confirmed that principal photography is still underway in Wellington, New Zealand, with local Weta Workshop (who handled special effects on **The Lord of the Rings**) working on the film.



COSPLAY CATWALK

A MONTHLY
FOCUS ON
THE COSTUMED
ROLE-PLAY SCENE AT
FAN CONVENTIONS
AROUND THE WORLD

TRIS TRINKET

READER'S COSPLAY

JOSH EDWARDS



STARBURST finds out more about another exciting player on the cosplay scene...

STARBURST: How long have you been cosplaying?

Tris Trinket: I've been cosplaying for over eight years. In this time, I have entered more than thirty masquerades, won a few prizes and even judged competitions. For the past six years, I have run cosplay make-up workshops and panels at many events across the UK.

What is your favourite character to dress as?

That is a tough one! It's probably a toss-up between Spider-Gwen and any of the variants of Sailor Moon I've cosplayed. Both of these characters I absolutely love and adore. Also they have the bonus points of being comfortable costumes!

How long do you normally spend making the costumes?

It can vary dependent on the costume and how much I procrastinate! Some I have managed to get made in a few hours and some spread over several weeks. Though I do have a bad habit of leaving a costume to make until the week before a convention!

You can find out more about Tris Trinket by heading over to facebook.com/tristrinketcosplay.



An enthusiastic cosplayer from Hampshire takes us through their passion...

STARBURST: How long have you been cosplaying?

Josh Edwards: I've been cosplaying for nearly three years. I started as Booker DeWitt from *Bioshock Infinite* and won an award for Best Skit. Because of that, it inspired me to continue cosplaying and get where I am today.

What is your favourite character to dress as?

I wouldn't say I have a favourite cosplay, as I love all the cosplays that I have done, but if I had to decide, it would be a tossup between my Edward Elric from *Full Metal Alchemist Brotherhood*, because I made the entire thing from scratch with one of my friends and it was my first cosplay with Worbla [thermoplastic modelling material], or my Disgust from *Inside Out* because it was my first crossplay and I absolutely love the character.

How long do you normally spend making the costumes?

That depends on the type of cosplay. My Edward Elric took me about 3 months to complete, including a 24-hour run in finishing the cosplay for its debut. At most, I can spend anywhere between a few weeks and a few months, depending on what I am cosplaying.

Words: Martin Unsworth



NEWS AND PREVIEWS
IN GAMING
BY LEE PRICE

PIXEL JUICE



Lionhead Closes

After a few months of rumours about the company's demise, Microsoft has finally confirmed that Lionhead Studios, which developed the **Fable** series amongst other games, is to be closed, with the upcoming **Fable Legends** also being cancelled.

Microsoft released the following statement last month: "We can confirm that after much consideration over the six-week consultation period with Lionhead employees, we have reached the decision to close Lionhead Studios. We have nothing but heartfelt thanks for the team at Lionhead for their significant contributions to Xbox and the games industry."

This is a sad day for British gaming, as Lionhead always had an eye towards innovation, even if their games rarely delivered everything that was promised. Hopefully, those who have lost their jobs will find new roles soon, as they are a talented bunch.

Jon Romero and Adrian Carmack Announce New Game

With **Doom 4** so close to being released, it's interesting to see that two of id's founders are also looking to release a title of their own. **Blackroom**, which is rather predictably going to be an FPS, is Jon Romero and Adrian Carmack's most recent effort to regain some relevance in the modern gaming industry and the duo are currently looking to raise funding to get the game off the ground.

Described as "a visceral, varied and violent shooter that harkens back to classic FPS play with a mixture of exploration, speed, and intense weaponised combat," the game is currently being funded using Kickstarter, so if you want to see what two of id's most important contributors have up their sleeves, then you know where to go! We just hope we don't end up getting another **Daikatana** mess if it does get funded.

COMING SOON



STAR OCEAN: INTEGRITY AND FAITHLESSNESS

PLATFORM: PS4
RELEASE DATE: JULY 1ST

The *Star Ocean* series has proven to be consistently popular over in Japan, but it has never quite managed to gain the same level of traction with Western audiences, despite the fact that most of the games deliver a pretty high level of quality. *Integrity and Faithlessness* is unlikely to buck that trend, but it does demonstrate Sony's willingness to bring less obvious titles to UK audiences and is almost certainly worth picking up for fans of classic JRPGs.

COMING SOON



DISNEY ART ACADEMY

PLATFORM: 3DS

RELEASE DATE: JULY 15TH

As you may already be able to tell, July is going to be a pretty lean month when it comes to new games, so we're really pulling up the dregs from the barrel with this one. Aimed at kids, obviously, *Disney Art Academy* looked at first like it would essentially be a virtual colouring book. However, it does have a drawing mechanic that will apparently help to train people to draw some of the most famous Disney characters. Probably not worth a punt as a game, but maybe if you're artistically-inclined.

RESIDENT EVIL: UMBRELLA CORPS Delayed

Resident Evil fans, if there are any left, will be disappointed to hear that Capcom has pushed back the release date for **Resident Evil: Umbrella Corps** to June 21st.

In a blog post, the company stated: "For the uninitiated, **Umbrella Corps** is a competitive, online third-person shooter set in the *Resident Evil* universe. Match types like One-Life Match and Multi-Mission Mode generally involve up to three-on-three shootouts that reward quick reflexes and steady aim. Zombies, infected canines, and other B.O.W.s will also swarm players if their Zombie Jammers take damage during a shootout, adding the tension of a looming threat to every battle".

They then went on to point out that the game was being delayed for a month so that "...the development team can spend some extra time optimising the game to bring you the best experience possible".

Whether the game will actually be a success or not is anybody's guess, especially given Capcom's rather patchy track record in recent years.



GEARS OF WAR 4 Release Date Announced

Gears of War 4 was announced way back at E3 2015, showing once again that Microsoft don't really understand what the word 'trilogy' means, but little more has been revealed since then - until this month.

The game now has an official release date of October 11th, which sees it being pushed forward from the initial 'Holiday 2016' date that was given. Either the development team are making amazing progress, or Microsoft aren't all that confident about how well the game will perform against other heavy-hitters come Christmas.

COMING SOON



JOJO'S BIZARRE ADVENTURE: EYES OF HEAVEN

PLATFORM: PS4

RELEASE DATE: JULY 1ST

Another obscure game comes to the PS4 this month that is unlikely to shift all that many units but might be an interesting title for those who follow the series.

Released in Japan in December of last year, *Eyes of Heaven* is essentially a fighting game that throws in a few tag-team elements to mix things up a little. Combat takes place in large arenas, with secondary characters being controlled by either the CPU or a second player. By the looks of things, though, it's nothing that you haven't seen before.

COMING SOON



SONG OF THE DEEP

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PC

RELEASE DATE: JULY 12TH

Developed by Insomniac Games, who have brought us classics like *Spyro the Dragon* and *Ratchet and Clank*, *Song of the Deep* looks to be an exploration and action game in the same vein as old-school *Metroid*. The story follows a twelve-year-old girl as she attempts to find all of the parts that she needs to craft a submarine that will let her search for her missing father, who is a fisherman. If Insomniac's previous output is anything to go by, this should actually be a pretty decent game.

What The Hell is PlayStation 4.5? ... Continued

As we reported last month, recent rumours have suggested that Sony is working on a new console that will essentially be an upgrade of the PlayStation 4; likely to offer more to those who end up buying PlayStation VR. Of course, this has caused consternation in the gaming community, with many existing PS4 owners worrying that games developed following this rumoured console's release will be limited on the current hardware, forcing players to purchase an entirely new console just to be able to play the most current games, despite the fact that this generation has only just gotten started.

Though nothing has been confirmed on Sony's side as of writing, further details have emerged that the console will be called the NEO, because **Matrix** references are so timely, which may allay some of those fears. Giant Bomb reported that: "Sony seems committed to keeping the NEO and the original PS4 player bases connected. As such, there will be no NEO-only games, and Sony will not let developers separate NEO users from original PS4 players while playing on PSN".

Interesting stuff, but none of it has actually been confirmed yet and it may just end up being a bunch of baseless rumour. Here's hoping that Sony don't end up shooting themselves in the foot after gaining so much goodwill in recent years in the gaming community.

Nintendo Announce Release Date for the NX

With all of the news mostly focusing around Microsoft and Sony, Nintendo has been quietly working away on their upcoming console, which they hope will bring them back up to speed with the current console race frontrunners following the fairly unimpressive showing put in by the Wii U.

The company has announced that their new console, which is codenamed the NX, is to be released worldwide in May 2017, which seems something of an odd choice given that it gives them little chance to take advantage of the holiday boom period. Perhaps they are hoping that the traditionally slower game release schedule that we get during the summer will convince more people to take a punt on the machine?

Again, the company is shy about releasing any more details about the console, other than calling it a 'new concept'. They have also pushed back the release of the latest **Legend of Zelda** game to coincide with the console's launch, which is sure to annoy Wii U owners who have been patiently waiting for what is likely to be the last great game that the console plays host to.

It will be interesting to see if the console can match up to the current industry juggernauts, as many think it would be wise for Nintendo to start trying to claw back some of the hardcore with a console of equal power that allows for more established properties to be converted onto it, rather than trying to recapture the lightning in a bottle that saw the Wii attain such success.



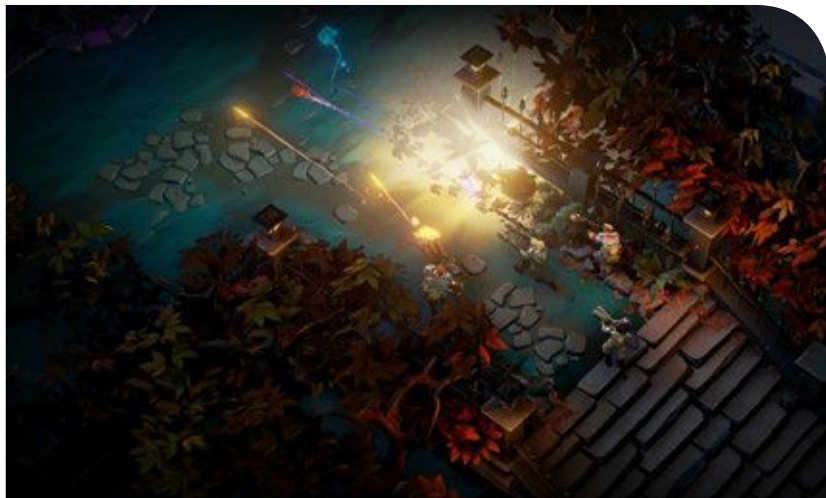
Ken Levine Is Back

Ken Levine, who is probably best known to modern gamers as the mind behind the **BioShock** series, is to return. It has been announced that he is going to start work on a new interactive, live-action **Twilight Zone** series, which is an idea that sounds both ridiculously ambitious and potentially brilliant.

In a recent interview, Levine commented: "Playing my games, you can probably tell **Twilight Zone** is something I grew up with. They speak to a larger truth. They're morality plays, fables, and often they're about a character who is going through an experience that's central to their life but also speaks to a larger part of the human condition. I don't think [Rod] Serling, at the beginning, set out to be a science fiction writer. But he found that this is a great medium to do metaphor".

This definitely sounds interesting and seems like a great transition for one of gaming's leading lights to make, especially if he harbours ambitions of breaking into television or film. Levine will write and direct the pilot episode, which we're sure many readers will find very interesting.

COMING SOON



GHOSTBUSTERS

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PC
RELEASE DATE: JULY 15TH

With the aim of releasing alongside the movie and a mobile game, this new *Ghostbusters* title is likely going to be little more than a quick cash-in, especially as there seems to be very little information about the game out there. There was still some confusion about whether this one had actually been confirmed or not before Activision finally announced it properly last month. Considering the pretty shocking trailers that have been used to hype the rebooted *Ghostbusters* series, we're holding out very little hope that this might be anything worth looking at. But who knows? Maybe we will get lucky and it will be as awesome as the 2009 game.

COMING SOON



I AM SETSUNA

PLATFORM: PS4, PC
RELEASE DATE: JULY 19TH

The third of our JPRGs this month is an interesting little curio that is developed by Tokyo RPG Factory and published by Square-Enix. *I Am Setsuna* has received a positive reception in its native Japan, which is always a positive when searching out decent JPRGs. It seems like pretty standard fare, offering another take on Square's fabled ATB system and a plot that involves a fair maiden who must be sacrificed to appease an angry demon. It should probably be a lot of fun for JRPG fans, though.

DARK SOULS III Breaks Records

Namco-Bandai will be celebrating this month as it has been revealed that the recently released **Dark Souls III** has become the fastest-selling game in the company's history. While exact figures weren't made available, this is a very impressive achievement given the fairly niche nature of the game, especially as it is being published by the team that brought gamers the **Tekken** series.

ROCK BAND 4 PC Kickstarter Hits a Duff Note

The rhythm-action genre hasn't exactly been kick-started by the release of **Rock Band 4**, despite Harmonix's best efforts, and their recent attempts to bring the game to the PC have also failed following a crowdfunding campaign that only managed to generate a little more than half of their \$1.5 million goal.

It seems we are not destined to see a resurgence in popularity for the genre, as gaming appears to have passed plastic instruments by, regardless of how much fun they can be.

REVIEWS

THE LATEST
GAMING RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



DARK SOULS III

DEVELOPER: FROMSOFTWARE / PUBLISHER: NAMCO BANDAI ENTERTAINMENT / PLATFORM: PC, XBOX ONE, PS4 / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Serving as the capstone for the Dark Souls trilogy, this final game allows FromSoftware's famed dark fantasy franchise to go out with a bang. Combining the greatest strengths found in the core series and its spiritual successor Bloodborne, what we have here can be considered the definitive version of the Dark Souls franchise.

Set long after the two prior games, the world has slid closer towards Armageddon. Ash now chokes the land and undead once more stalk the abandoned cities, now occupied by monstrosities born of the impending cataclysm. The only salvation lies in the Lords of Cinder, champions who once linked the fire, but following their corruption they refused to retake their thrones...

From the synopsis, you can probably guess that FromSoftware are sticking to their guns on this one. In terms of mechanics and overall storyline, it serves as a much more refined and well-rounded version of a Dark Souls experience. Even when you encounter some composite character or a suspiciously similar NPC to those met in past outings, they will usually feature some innate twist on their prior incarnation. This is matched with the overall level designs, which are familiar but

vastly more chaotic and disturbing than anything met in the past two games. This proves to be especially true of the boss fights, each of which proves to be a vast improvement over the disappointing heavy hitters of Dark Souls II.

The mechanics themselves stick to what you know, and while there is a chance for faster reactions or a few fun weapons, it never veers away from the formula that made the series successful. The real fun, however, stems from the world's structure. While admittedly linear, it's considerably better paced, laid out and structured when it comes to encountering foes. There are also multiple opportunities left to still stray off the beaten path, and run into all sorts of surprises, deadly or otherwise. Equally, backtracking and returning to past locations remains a core part of the game, and combine that with a New Game+ mode (which features more than a few new surprises) and the replay value here is through the roof.

There are few games truly worthy of being called "perfect" but Dark Souls III comes closer than any game in the last decade. Barring a few odd frame rate issues on console, and the aforementioned linear structure which may be off-putting to some veterans, there are no criticisms

worthy of levelling at this game. Any fan of the grim fantasy genre, any gamer who can persevere through death time and time again, this is most definitely the game for you. Grab it without hesitation.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★★★10





THE BANNER SAGA 2

DEVELOPER: STOIC / PUBLISHER: VERSUS EVIL / PLATFORM: PC, XBOX ONE, PS4, OS X / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When it hit the Steam store back in 2014, *The Banner Saga* was a godsend to so many RPG fanatics. Breaking away from many modern trends and refusing to pull its punches, it offered a mature and dynamic Game of Thrones level Nordic saga and paired it up with punishing, story driven choices on the player's part. Bleak, beautiful and with an animated aesthetic rarely seen today, it was torturous to watch its developer Stoic caught up in two major lawsuits, the first being the infamous King lawsuit, and the second surrounding the much-reviled AFM Agreement. It's no small wonder that the second part of this trilogy has taken two years to finally see the light of day, but the wait has been well worth it.

Catching up with the heroes merely hours after the harrowing finale to the first game, the few surviving humans and varl march onwards to escape the varl onslaught. Taking to the rivers, they begin the long journey towards the human capital, hoping to find respite from the continued onslaught and perhaps even the answer to why the dredge have launched this massive invasion.

The storytelling here is top notch, but with two former Bioware employees at the helm that goes without saying. Perfectly capturing the grim nature and immensity of tales about Vikings facing the world's end, dead gods and serpents consuming the earth, it manages to resonate on both a grand and personal level. It never fails to balance out the Ragnarok-level threat the heroes face with the fact you're leading a band of very frightened, starving refugees to safety, and can all too easily lose everything to a poor choice. Choice really does matter here as, while the bulk of the story will remain the same, saying the wrong thing or making the wrong choice will have long standing consequences. Risk fording a river? Chances are you'll lose a lot of people if it goes wrong. Risk sending a character to distract a bigger army? They may well end up permanently dead.

The risky nature and harsh realities you face are aptly reflected in the mechanics, as losing someone in combat isn't simply a

wrist-slap. If you have someone fall fighting a powerful foe, they'll be wounded and fighting at a fraction of their strength for days afterwards. Recovering will take time and supplies you can rarely afford to waste, meaning you might starve between towns. Oh, and even if you get to those towns? If you spend renown from your battles to upgrade your warriors, you might only get a fraction of the food you need. There's never a feeling of safety or security offered at any turn, and always a sense that your story can end at the hands of a very big, very nasty threat hiding just around the next corner.

The actual combat mechanics themselves are outstanding, rewarding intelligence and clear planning over brute strength or spamming favoured units. Sending half a dozen of your characters into the fray, you fight your way across a grid-based system in turn-based combat. While this might sound like *Final Fantasy Tactics* with more Vikings, it carries greater depth by seriously mixing up the class-based system and the actual stats themselves. There's no MP you can spam spells with, only a very limited amount of willpower points for special abilities, and none of the usual knight, white mage and thief options you'd expect. It requires serious trial and error and a cautious approach on the player's part to learn each and every one, and with new classes arising unheralded as you progress, you can't simply rely upon past experience.

However, there are a number of problems which sadly hold the game back. For starters, there are a few too many times where the game will throw an idea at you without any opportunity to prepare for it. Many choices and options have some degree of luck to them, but you can usually predict their outcome with some basic common sense. However, many others also keep throwing out curve balls or changing the rules on a whim, meaning you end up losing no matter what you do. This can become especially frustrating when certain scenarios seem to withhold details from you, or force the player to advance based upon very limited information. It's one thing to lose because

you did something stupid or when you're facing down a legitimate no-win scenario but it's another entirely when the smallest thing causes you to lose half of your stores. Such moments were in the original game admittedly, but they're far more frequent and infinitely more infuriating here.

What's more, certain sections keep throwing new ideas or concepts into combat with barely any explanation or even a general warning. A gauntlet of fights in a mineshaft will likely cause more than a few players to rage quit if not repeatedly reload saves until they nail a certain fight, especially once new foes unveil some very nasty special abilities.

Finally, the game is very reliant upon players being familiar with past events. Its many numerous characters go unremarked upon until certain points in the game and few indeed are re-introduced to the story at any point. Certain characters can go chapters without saying a thing only to abruptly become important, and many others comment upon past events from the previous game with little context. For a game so heavily story-driven as this one, this remains a severe limitation that harms player immersion and engagement.

Despite a few failings, however, *The Banner Saga 2* is a definite success and a true modern classic. There are few games released today which can match the sheer depth of its storytelling, impact of its decisions and an atmosphere so thick you could grind an axe on it. While it's infuriating at times and offers more than a few moments where you'll be pressed to give up entirely, this only makes seeing the credits roll all the more satisfying and leaves you hungering to see this trilogy close out. Definitely nab this one at the earliest opportunity, but if you're not familiar with the series be sure to start with the original game.

CALLUM SHEPHARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



8-BIT ARMIES

DEVELOPER & PUBLISHER: PETROGLYPH / PLATFORM: PC / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

8-Bit Armies was a game released with two goals: offer a classic RTS experience, by the people who practically built the genre from the ground up, and present it as a gateway to new audiences. With a retro-inspired look, a fun but basic interface and a lengthy campaign, it's the closest we've had to a true Command & Conquer experience in years.

This really is about as old school as you can get, without resorting to ASCII graphics, but with a few modern improvements. While the unit building and command interface is classic C&C to the core, the build queue, structure and ability

to scan about the map offers far more opportunities for unit micromanagement. The actual unit structure also retains a decent mix of hard and soft counters, but it's largely bereft of the more bullet-spongy builds you might expect, meaning a match can swing either way even during its final minutes.

Along with twenty-five offline missions, there's a ten mission co-op campaign to help ease new players in, and plenty of bonus objectives to keep you coming back to them. Even without that though, the multiplayer and skirmish modes are solidly built, with a broad number of differently themed

maps to keep you entertained, each capable of supporting up to eight players.

However, there's one very distinct problem with this game – it's alarmingly bereft of personality and lacking some much-needed army variety. Aside from the visual aesthetic and Frank Klepacki's outstanding soundtrack, there's not much to make this stand out, with little in the way of unique units or even super-weapons. With only a single faction on offer with the usual mix of tank, infantryman, helicopter, nuke etc, it's remarkably bare bones, and retains little tactical variety and staying power. Petroglyph has planned for the game to feature six key factions – with a very fun-looking skeletons & wizards fantasy addition on the horizon – but in its current state

it's easy to get bored of this very basic build. This really is the sort of game which would benefit from an Early Access release, but it's presented as finished on Steam's main page.

8-Bit Armies ultimately offers a well-rounded, simple framework for something which might become fantastic later on down the line, but little else. In its current state it is very hard to recommend to anyone who isn't looking for a low budget, low requirement RTS, and even then the classic C&C releases still give you so much more bang for your buck. Keep an eye on this one in the months to come, but for the time being stick to Grey Goo and Ashes of the Singularity.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★ 6



GAME OF THRONES: THE TRIVIA GAME

DESIGNER: JONATHAN YING / PUBLISHER: FANTASY FLIGHT GAMES / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Hit fantasy TV series Game of Thrones now has five complete seasons under its belt and a legion of fans that seem to be able to recite everything from the Night's Watch Oath to how large Podrick Payne's underpants are. Given how much fans love to show off their hard-earned knowledge, a quiz game was inevitable.

Fantasy Flight Games have done a pretty sterling job so far of turning the popular show into a table-top gaming experience, but surely even the mighty FFG can't take something as mundane as a TV trivia game to the next level? They get pretty close, by doing what they always do – embracing the theme of the franchise as much as possible.

Game of Thrones: The Trivia Game is a two to four player game, in which players answer questions about the people, locations, and events of Game of Thrones' first four seasons (the spoiler-phobic among you will be happy to know that the seasons are clearly marked on the cards). Some of the questions involve screen shots from the TV series, which is also charming. The game is based on the TV show, which occasionally puts fans of the books at a disadvantage; both frustrating and hilarious at the same time.

Each card has one to three questions. Before a single question is asked, you get to decide how many questions you want to answer. Take a big risk; get a big 'wedge'. The game board is a map of Westeros, and the aim of the game is to stick as many of your wedges as you can on key locations around the board.

The advanced rules add a resource management element

to the game. Correct answers give you coin, raven or sword tokens. Save up the right type of resources and you can draw ally cards. Each ally is a character from the show, and they have special abilities that give you an edge in the game (usually when answering questions). You can also form allegiances with other players, but this is Game of Thrones, you may want to be careful whom you ally with.

For a quiz game, Game of Thrones: The Trivia Game is surprisingly smooth and entertaining. Despite the narrow subject matter, the questions aren't too obscure, though if you've never seen the show you're not going to have a good time. The advanced elements make it strategic and engaging, and the allegiance rules add a touch of much-needed sneakiness. For what it is, it's rather good.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★ 8



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A LOOK BACK AT
THE WORLD OF
RETRO GAMING
BY CHRIS JACKSON



Rockstar returned with *Manhunt* - a game so vicious and disturbing that you could be forgiven for assuming they had purposely gone all-out in an attempt to stick two fingers up at their critics by creating the most over the top title imaginable...

From the very first moment that *Manhunt* was announced, it was clear that this was going to be something worth paying attention to. The initial trailer, released in summer 2003, was unlike anything we'd seen before in the world of video games; there were no flashy graphics, no eye-catching buzzwords, and no pounding soundtrack. In their place was what appeared to be clips of grainy CCTV footage of an unnamed man lurking in the shadows in a grimy rundown city, set to a monotonous synth backing track. What were we looking at? What (and where) on earth is this?!

The hype machine went into full effect for the next couple of months, until *Manhunt* was finally unleashed in November 2003. That same grainy CCTV footage from the original trailer graced the front cover of the game itself, which featured nothing but a menacing VHS-style close-up of a masked bloody face. The blurb on the back of the box would have been enough to set pulses racing on its own, even without the terrifying images that accompanied it, promising a 'brutal blood sport' where 'nothing matters any more' and 'anything goes'. It might not sound like much now, but back then, it felt so edgy and exciting that it really did make the game appear to be an utterly enticing proposition. As if the thrill of getting our

MURDEROUS MAYHEM

Manhunt (PS2/Xbox/PC, 2003)

Rockstar Games is no strangers to controversy, first coming to the attention of the general public in 2001 when some of the more questionable parts of *Grand Theft Auto 3* were picked up on by the media. The main complaints stemmed from the fact that the series had made the leap to 3D, abandoning the 2D top-down perspective that had been used in *GTA 1* and *2*, resulting in the level of violence seeming to be far more realistic than ever before. The much-discussed issue of paying a prostitute for the use of her saucy health-replenishing services before killing her to get your money back caused many a mass debate on daytime TV, where countless well-informed game developers were ruthlessly shouted down in dazzling displays of ignorance by bellowing talk show presenters who had no idea what they were talking about. 'Celebrity' supermarket shoplifter Richard Madeley made a particularly outlandish claim on every housewife's favourite TV show *This Morning*, insisting that "I know, in the next three or four years, these games will have evolved to the point where the graphics will be so good that it'll be like controlling a movie. I know for a fact that this is true". That was in 2002. We're still waiting, Richard.

The prickly subject of murder also reared its ugly head, with technology

apparently having now progressed to the point where video games had become no longer the sole preserve of video nasties. The 2002 release of *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* didn't help matters, as the mainstream press were still steadfastly refusing to get off their high horses, after the release of *GTA 3* twelve months earlier. Then, in 2003,



hands on *Manhunt* wasn't enough, there was one more heart-pounding discovery lying in wait...

There was a time when one of the best things about getting a new game was opening the box and flicking through the instruction book - it was something we all did, and something that many of us actively looked forward to. Some of us would even smell the pages. That New Instruction Book Smell was a truly wonderful thing. But what's this? No instruction book?! Rockstar had cleverly disguised their manual as a DVD/video preview catalogue, taking us on a hate-filled journey through the world of snuff films and torture porn before we'd even got round to putting the disc into our console. The overall presentation gave a feeling of uneasiness and fear, and made you feel like you were about to take part in something that you really shouldn't be doing. But, of course, these were exactly the kind of thrills we knew we'd be letting ourselves in for, so let's buckle up and see what the game has got in store!

The opening cutscene fills us in on the story so far. You are death row prisoner James Earl Cash, and this is your execution. Except it isn't, as somebody has decided to purposely botch the procedure for reasons known only to themselves. A voice tells Cash to pick up an earpiece from a nearby table, follow instructions, and 'it will all be over before the end of the night'. After being released into an abandoned section of Carcer City (a name possibly familiar to recent *GTA* players, as it still gets mentioned now and again), it's up to you to guide Cash through the streets and hopefully see the night out in one piece.

As you might expect, the opening level teaches the basic game mechanics. There are a whole host of weapons available throughout the game, each with its own corresponding colour and three increasingly outrageous levels of executions. Green weapons such as plastic bags and glass shards are relatively tame and break after one use, while blue weapons (crowbars, meat



cleavers) are stronger and result in more extreme violence, but also have the undesirable side-effect of being noisy to use, therefore attracting the attention of any nearby 'hunters'. And then there are the red weapons like the spiked baseball bat - these are the biggest, strongest and nastiest of all, but also the most likely to attract enemies to your location. Firearms are available later on, and there is also a variety of projectiles such as bricks, bottles, and the severed heads of defeated enemies, which can be thrown to attract the attention of any nearby thugs.

Each area of Carcer City is inhabited by members of various gangs (the aforementioned 'hunters'), such as the white supremacist 'Skinz' who rule over an abandoned scrapyard, or the Satanic 'Innocentz' who rule over the abandoned mall. Each gang has their own look, and the game is full of darkly comic dialogue which almost endears you to some of these brutes. But as the disembodied voice of 'The Director' in our earpiece tells us, it's not worth getting too attached to anyone. *"As far as you're concerned, they're all meat."*

The only way to make it through the city in one piece is to murder each and

every single member in what can quickly become the most genuinely terrifying game of cat and mouse ever created. Your job is to guide Cash around the city, lurking in the shadows and stalking your prey, waiting for an opportunity to leap out and dispatch the bad guys one by one. Hunters will call for backup if they become aware of your presence, leading to a tense chase through the streets while you try to outrun the oncoming hordes and find a safe place to hide.

Players earn a 'style rating' at the end of each level, with faster completion times and more brutal executions giving the highest scores. Achieving consistently high ratings rewards the player with cheat codes and extra unlockable scenes, so the aim of the game really is to be as violent as possible.

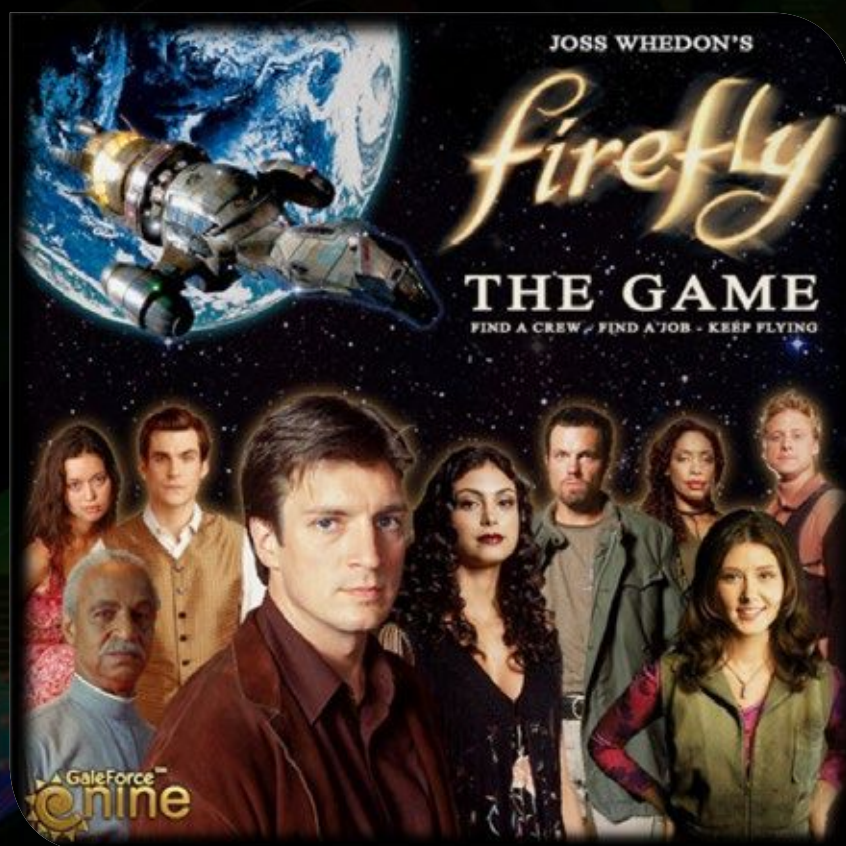
Even today, playing through *Manhunt* can be quite a harrowing experience. It's easily one of the most nihilistic pieces of 'entertainment' ever made, and there simply isn't any other game quite like it (at least not on general release, as far as we know). The horrific squelches, screams and moans that form a large part of the game's background noise combine with the dark and gritty art direction to create one of the most oppressive and frightening atmospheres we've ever experienced in a video game. Add the fact that you're following orders from an unseen director and effectively starring in your own snuff movie into the mix, and you can really see why the mainstream media were so up in arms about the whole thing. As a result of the game's content, *Manhunt* was banned in New Zealand, recalled from sale and banned in Germany, and in a somewhat bizarre move, refused classification and effectively banned in Australia in late 2004, after the game had already been on sale for almost a whole year.

For anyone who hasn't played *Manhunt* before, we really can't recommend it highly enough. Yes, it's depraved, disgusting, and reprehensible and all that sort of stuff, but it's also incredibly tense, thrilling, exciting, and challenging. Switch the lights off, close the curtains, and with a bit of luck it will all be over before the end of the night... +



ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE
GUIDES YOU
THROUGH THE
REALM OF
TABLETOP GAMING



player to player so no one forgets who's go it is) happens to be in the shape of a dinosaur. If you've not seen *Firefly*, you won't get why this is funny, and if you have seen the show, then you're probably already re-enacting the scene with Wash and his plastic dinosaurs in your head right now. At the Secret STARBURST Thunderdome, we've replaced the cardboard marker with an actual plastic dinosaur, because that's the sort of nerds we are.

Most of the counters are plastic, of course. Often players will want to pilot their own version of the *Serenity*, the clunky cargo ship from the show, but the game has lots of fairly standard *Firefly*-class ships for you to choose from, and many of them have some clever little twiddle that makes it fun to finess your play style. More customisation comes by getting the right sort of captain; if you fancy a more heroic game, play Mal (or someone like him). Want to be more of a villain? Well, slavers are entirely playable.

If you're feeling truly adventurous, different sorts of ships entirely are available; Bounty Hunters and Salvagers can be added (with the appropriately titled Pirates and Bounty Hunter expansions). But the core game works just fine with the little insect-like *Serenity* clones wandering around the board. They look right; atmospheric.

The in-game money is similarly clever. Each denomination feels like they've been taken from one of planets in the 'Verse', and they also feel a lot like real foreign money. You can almost imagine using it on Persephone to convince Badger to sell you that apple of his. Which brings us to one of the game's main mechanics: the various planets and the shady dealings that you

Take my love
Take my land
Take me where I cannot stand
I don't care
I'm still free
You can't take the dice from me...

I think those are the lyrics for the theme tune to cult TV show *Firefly*. Possibly. But seriously, don't try and take my dice away from me, the results will not be terribly pleasant. Now, board games based on TV shows, movies and the like are nothing new; this column is often dedicated to some of the better tie-in games out there. The *Firefly* game is something a little different than your usual 'game-of-the-show', because it's so steeped in the themes and mythology of the story that they are pretty much inseparable.

At its heart, the *Firefly* board game should simply be yet another travel and trade game. Take your spaceship from one end of the board to the other, avoid hazards, and drop off cargo, and then repeat, doing it more skilfully and quickly than other players so you win. In many

ways, it's not much different from *Black Fleet* or the *Ivor the Engine* game, being a drifting, meandering sort of affair.

The thing the *Firefly* game does is it gets the way the fans love the show, and why.

For example, the 'turn marker' (the little counter that gets passed from





get up to when you're on them.

Various worlds will either have shops or dodgy contacts. Pop over to their system and start your negotiations; you'll want decent crew and perhaps lots of guns and trade goods. You can draw missions from the various personalities dotted around the Verse and each is thematically appropriate. Badger will give you something dodgy to do, Prudence wants you to take risks and so on. You shop for kit and people; the cards are face up so you can see what's available where and plan your trips across the void with a bit of a plan.

Getting your ship around on the board can be a fraught task; after all, in the show, we get an entire episode focusing on what happens when the crew runs out of parts and supplies. You can get by if you move slowly, but if you ever want to get anywhere, you need to take a full burn action, which costs fuel. When moving, players will draw cards from either a Boarder Space or Alliance Space deck, depending on the territory. These decks are primarily made up of 'Keep Flying Cards', but they may also contain events that happen to your crew. Some of the nastier events involve Reaver

Raids, or Alliance Customs Inspections. Both baddies have their own ships on the board, of course. With the expansions, there is even the risk of some mysterious Blue Sun operatives arriving to make your life more difficult.

Provided you manage to get to your destination without running out of fuel, getting grabbed by Reavers or getting arrested, you still need to do your mission. With the right crew and the right tools, you can aim to misbehave and complete some sort of task. Rinse and repeat. The game has various scenarios, so combinations of missions and tasks stack up to lead to win condition; these are all reminiscent of the show itself. Ever wanted to re-enact the end of the movie *Serenity*? There's pretty much a variant of the game that lets you pull it off.

Expansions add a level of interactivity to the whole affair; you can cheerfully go on pirate missions and raid your fellow players. Want to jump aboard the *Serenity*, kidnap River Tam and hand her over to the authorities? Totally doable. This adds a much-needed touch of competition to the game. The out-of-the-box core version of *Firefly: the*



We'll be at the UK GAMES EXPO and so should you...

At the beginning of June, we're going to be at the UK Games Expo, playing games, talking to gamers and generally having fun. One of the things we're excited about are workshops. Those seeking to expand their skills and looking to get their games into the market should be well catered for.

Games industry artists Gillian Pierce (*Hellions Art*) and Linda Jones (*SheBlackDragon*) will be hosting a workshop in which you can learn more about the fine profession of game art. Writer Darren Pierce (*Cubicle 7, Mongoose Publishing*) will also be running a workshop for wannabe games writers.

Gamers can also chance their hand in *The Wyvern's Lair*, where they get to pitch fresh games ideas to industry pros. The titular Wyverns will be a panel of games professionals who will assess and evaluate the games. This is a chance for new talent to show off their ideas to people who work for games producers such as Mayfair Games, Inside the Box, and Osprey Games.

Now in its tenth year, the event is so large that it has to be hosted in both Birmingham NEC and the nearby Birmingham Hilton. The UK Games Expo is set to be the table-top gaming event of the year, with everything from X-Wing Tournaments to the Ticket to Ride National Championships. Other attractions include war-gaming, card games, LARPing, RPGs, and live events amongst much more.

It takes place from June 3rd to 5th, find out more and book tickets at ukgamesexpo.co.uk.

Board Game is pretty much something that you play on your own whilst in the company of friends because you aren't really competing against yourself, you're competing against the game.

As space games go, *Firefly the Board Game* works for three reasons. One: it's a decent game with plenty going on and plenty depth. Two: it's very, very immersive and it's the closest you're ever going to get to being Mal Reynolds. And finally, if everyone playing is also a fan of the show, it becomes a way of celebrating the show with friends. The game becomes very in-jokey and full of reminiscences, making it a great evening for geeks.

Until next month, keep rolling those dice! ⁺

Ed Fortune can be tweeted at @ed_fortune and contacted via ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com



WATTO'S EMPORIUM

STUFF WE LIKED FROM
AROUND THE WEB
THIS MONTH WITH
JACK BOTTOMLEY

GoT GOES POP!

Game of Thrones Season Six is currently in full swing on our television screens and we, like everyone else, have been enthralled to see what new twists, turns and demises HBO's excellent adaptation of George R. R. Martin's novels has to offer us week in and week out. In occasion of the varied array of characters that inhabit Westeros, **hboshopeu.com** has amassed an array of brand spanking new **Game of Thrones** vinyl POP Figures. Included in the range is the Red Priestess herself, Melisandre, Jorah 'pursuer of Daenerys' Mormont, a member of the Unsullied, a Harpy, a fully-armoured Stannis Baratheon, a very neat looking Bronn, a colourful Margaery Tyrell and a chilling Night's King. Though our favourite is the Daenerys & Drogon figure, which is somehow both cute and ferocious.

MELISANDRE, DAENERYS & DROGON, JORAH MORMONT, UNSULLIED, HARPY, STANNIS BARATHEON, BRONN, MARGAERY TYRELL, NIGHT'S KING POP FIGURES - £9.99 EACH

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COWABEANIE!

Depending on when this issue is in your very hands, David Green's **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Out of the Shadows** may well be in cinemas. Whether you enjoyed the re-invention of the heroes in a half shell or not, these beanie hats from **grindstore.com** are brilliantly colourful bits of merch that will please the fanbase of the reptilian, pizza gobbling heroes. Though, as tempted as you may be, we would not recommend pulling the masked eyehole designs over your actual eyes. After all, Shredder can attack at any time... as can an oncoming car.

**TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES
LEONARDO, RAPHAEL, MICHELANGELO,
DONATELLO BEANIES- £9.99 EACH
ALL AVAILABLE FROM GRINDSTORE.COM**

X-CELLENT BELT BUCKLE

Last issue looked at Bryan Singer's long-awaited, mutant-crammed **X-Men: Apocalypse** but now that the film is in cinemas, we thought we'd X-citedly suggest you X-ceed the boundaries of belt buckle fashion by seeking out this X-Men themed belt buckle from **beltsbucklestees.com**, which exudes X-appeal. For any fellow fan of the super-powered mutant heroes out there, this is sure to go down a storm. That's enough punnage for now, we think.

**X-MEN BELT BUCKLE - £15
AVAILABLE FROM BELTSBUCKLESTEEES.COM**



SPACE INVADERZZZZZ

This issue has had a lot of focus on the upcoming alien actioner **Independence Day: Resurgence** (see page 14), but amidst all that crash, bang, and wallop, this item from **Redbubble.com** is not quite the action-heavy tie-in merch piece. The brainchild of Phunt, this **Independence Day: Resurgence** throw pillow looks cozy and cool, decorated with a redux poster design for the upcoming blockbuster. Talk about a sleeper hit! However, if you prefer your alien-themed snooze-aids a little bit more retro, then you cannot go wrong with this **Mars Attacks** sleep mask from **attitudeclothing.co.uk**. The peepers of the Martian invaders (which are mentioned on page 20) from Tim Burton's underappreciated 1996 satirical fun-fest make for a great deterrent to any potential bedroom invaders looking to wake you up.

**INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE
THROW PILLOWS - £14.59
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ATTITUDECLOTHING.CO.UK**



SHIRT SCARED

As James Wan follows up his 2013 horror hit with **The Conjuring 2** (see page 68), we were spooked once again by the scene-stealer of **The Conjuring**, horrendous true-life based doll, Annabelle. This shirt we found on **ebay.com** is enough to give anyone the heebie jeebies, as it is plastered with images of the possessed porcelain doll, and is a treat for any modern horror buff. However, it does further anchor the point that anyone who actually went out and bought this doll deserves to be haunted - I mean who would actually buy Annabelle?!

**ANNABELLE LONG SLEEVE SHIRT - \$27.99 USD (APPROX. £19.20)
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STARBURST: EVENT PROFILE



WORDS: ED FORTUNE
PHOTOS: MIKE SMITH

SCI-FI SCARBOROUGH 2016: The Spa Complex, Scarborough, April 9th - 10th, 2016

The STARBURST team always relish a trip to the seaside, especially if there's plenty of things for a sci-fi fan to do while we are there. So it was with a fair amount of glee that we went to 2016's Sci-Fi Scarborough (SFS) at The Spa this April. Last year's event was one of our favourites, and this year's merely confirmed what we knew: Sci-Fi Scarborough is a top notch event and fun for all the family.

SFS is only in its third year, but rapidly growing in reputation and popularity, mostly due to it actually

having something for everyone. Rather than having one big draw, SFS fills the seaside venue with lots of things. For example, there's a whole room packed with *Minecraft* servers, which doubles as a handy place to store the kids, and the venue has a renovated Victorian theatre that they use to hold a mini-film festival, filled with fan films.

SFS also has an interesting approach to guests, as they are very accessible and pretty much always part of the action. The famous people doing the signings are involved with the fun. Fans of space opera were well catered for. *Battlestar Galactica*'s Richard Hatch, *Babylon 5*'s Claudia Christian, and *Star Trek: Voyager*'s Garrett Wang were in attendance the whole weekend. Dan Starkey and Barnaby Edwards kept the British quota up by representing *Doctor Who*, while *Red Dwarf*'s Norman Lovett was on top form, chatting away to guests, and especially sparkled during the panels. *Game of Thrones* convention

mainstays Luke Barnes, Josephine Gillan, and Miltos Yerolemu were on hand on the Sunday to meet fans, sign autographs, and provide a thoroughly entertaining panel.

Milos also delivered his now-famous 'Water Dancing' lesson, and local entertainers provided their special brand of Jedi Academy-style training. There was, of course, a Dalek in attendance, yelling its head off. Luckily, it was kept under control by the various Astromech droids provided by the R2 Builders Club.

The Spa itself is a great venue, and a handy map (and panel schedule) was provided for all attendees. Everything is nicely laid out, meaning that there is rarely a crush of people. There are also plenty of bars, which meant that the STARBURST team was well watered throughout the event. Where you have geeks and bars, it seems you must also have a sci-fi pub quiz, which was also well handled and quite fun.

A spot of bad weather meant that



some events were rescheduled; panels were moved into the Fan Film Theatre, as was the Cosplay competition. This worked quite well, as it's a good space to host panels as well as show all sorts of short movies on constant rotation. It was a little crowded with all the cosplayers in it, but it worked well in a pinch. The maps were nice, but a little bit more signage for the more bewildered amongst us would have also been useful. Did we mention the multiple bars?

Sci-Fi Scarborough stands out amongst the wealth of similar events out there, thanks to a combination of a great venue and a very strong, community minded ethos. On the face of it, SFS is your classic sci-fi event with a handful of celebs, some exhibitors and the odd panel or two. But its approach is deeper and cleverer than that. SFS integrates good old-fashioned Scarborough tourism with community engagement.

The result of this is that visitors are treated well by people used to dealing with tourists. The event volunteers are drawn from the local arts college, as well as Scarborough-based fan groups and fundraising teams. This means we get a central plaza filled with local bands giving their acts a sci-fi twist, as well as plenty of smiling faces happy to help. SFS is, we hope, the future of sci-fi events; the community coming together to have fun, rather than simply shop for geeky chat.

The overall impression you get from Sci-Fi Scarborough is that they're happy to see you and want you to dive in and have fun. This friendly, family-positive atmosphere means that even the grumpiest of people (even non-fans) are hard pressed not to find something to enjoy. We can't wait to see how this event grows, and are looking forward to seeing what it does in 2017.

For more information, and to keep up to date on next year's event, head over to scifiscarborough.co.uk.



PAUL MOUNT'S



This month we time travel back to 11.22.63 (22.11.63 for the benefit of UK readers), endure a close encounter with E4's THE ALIENS and worry for the future of THE WALKING DEAD...

No beating about the bush this month. No long-winded intro, no set-up, no flim-flam or flannel. Just the facts. I've been watching **11.22.63**, a (genuine) one-shot event series screening on Fox in the UK after airing on the Hulu streaming service in the States, based on one of Stephen King's more recent doorstep novels. It may only be May, but I think I've found the best TV show of 2016, as I really can't imagine anything in the pipeline coming close in terms of thrilling narrative, intelligent plotting and gob-smackingly compelling acting married to a brilliantly simple and yet magnificently realised concept. Like last year's **Wayward Pines**, it has completely blown me away, but

unlike **Wayward Pines** (and I'm not hugely impressed with pre-publicity material for the upcoming unnecessary second season), **11.22.63** is a proper, bona fide 'one and done' series. There can and will be no more. Hurrah for brevity (and, for that matter, creative integrity).

James Franco (just about forgiven by now for **The Interview** – it didn't offend me, I just thought it was dire) stars as Jake Epping, a newly divorced teacher from Maine (it's a Stephen King novel, what do you expect?), whose life and career are going nowhere. Fortunately, Al Templeton (Chris Cooper), the owner of the local diner where Jake eats unfeasibly cheap burgers, reveals that he has a secret (and mercifully

unexplained) time portal in the back of his closet. This portal leads directly – and only – back to October 1960.

Al has been nipping back and forth through the time portal (hence the cheap beef), but during one of his more protracted visits (travellers can stay in the past as long as they like but when they come back to their own time only two minutes has elapsed and the timeline they've created returns to normal), he's contracted cancer so his time-hopping days are coming to an end. But Al has an interesting theory; he reasons – as many Americans have – that the world might have turned out to be a better, brighter place if John F. Kennedy (that's JFK to you and me) hadn't been assassinated in Dallas on November 22nd, 1963. What if someone could pop back in time and hang around a few years to prevent JFK being offed by Lee Harvey Oswald (if, indeed, it was he who did the deed; there are, of course, numerous theories as to what really happened that day in Dealey Plaza in Dallas)? What might the world have become if JFK had lived and thrived? Al and Jake fall out as the latter thinks it's an unreasonable, impossible task; but when Al suddenly passes away, Jake decides to take on the mantle of potential saviour of the world, steps through the portal and – with nothing much to lose in the modern world – decides to sit it out and see if he can change the course of history.

The story that unfolds across the series' tight eight-episode run is really just about as good as we can realistically expect modern genre TV to get. There are no flashy visuals here, no elaborate and fanciful time travelling gizmo – Jake just steps into a darkened room and re-emerges in the DayGlo rock 'n' roll world of 1960. Faced with the prospect of carving out a new life for himself in another era as he prepares for his fateful mission, he travels to Texas, settles himself in the



11.22.63



11.22.63

nearby (and entirely fictional) town of Jodie, where he becomes a teacher (future habits die hard) and, equipped with his mentor Al's copious notes and historical clippings, sets about working out a vague plan to spy on Oswald, who defected to Russia in 1959, but returned to Dallas in June 1962 with a Russian bride.

What really makes **11.22.63** such bravura television is the fact that its time travelling conceit is just a handy McGuffin to tell a beautifully observed human story of fate and destiny. Tells us to be careful of what we wish for because, if we get it, it might not necessarily be what we expect. The series isn't concerned with the whys and wherefores of time travel; there's just this portal, hidden in a closet, and it's a gateway back into an absorbing, fantastically realised moment in American history, the after effects of which are still resonating across American culture some five decades later. Arriving back in 1960, Jake tries to blend into his new environment, attracting as little attention as possible, biding his time until Oswald returns to the UK and he can formulate his real plan to change the course of human history. But Al has already warned him that Time is a stubborn mistress and she doesn't like being interfered with. As Jake becomes more embedded into his new life, strange and inexplicable occurrences - accidents and coincidences - seem to occur to keep the timeline intact. But when, shortly after his arrival in 1960, he manages to save the family of one of his future mature students from being slaughtered by the mother's drunken, abusive husband, Jake begins to realise that perhaps there is, after all, a possibility that he might be able to make a difference and maybe even help make a better world.

Happily, the series doesn't make us sit around and wait before getting to the good stuff. Once ensconced in his new life and with young Bill Turcotte (George Mackay), whom he's forced to take into his

confidence, in tow, the show leaps forward to 1962. Once Oswald reappears on the scene, Jake and Bill conspire to move next door; they set up a web of sophisticated listening equipment to discover if Oswald really was a lone operator or if the CIA or some other power were involved in a plot to kill the President. But the show is beautifully tapestried with other storylines, including Jake's sweet romance with fellow teacher Sadie (Sarah Gadon) and, in Episode Five, a tense and terrifying confrontation with her sadistic ex-husband Johnny (T. R. Knight).

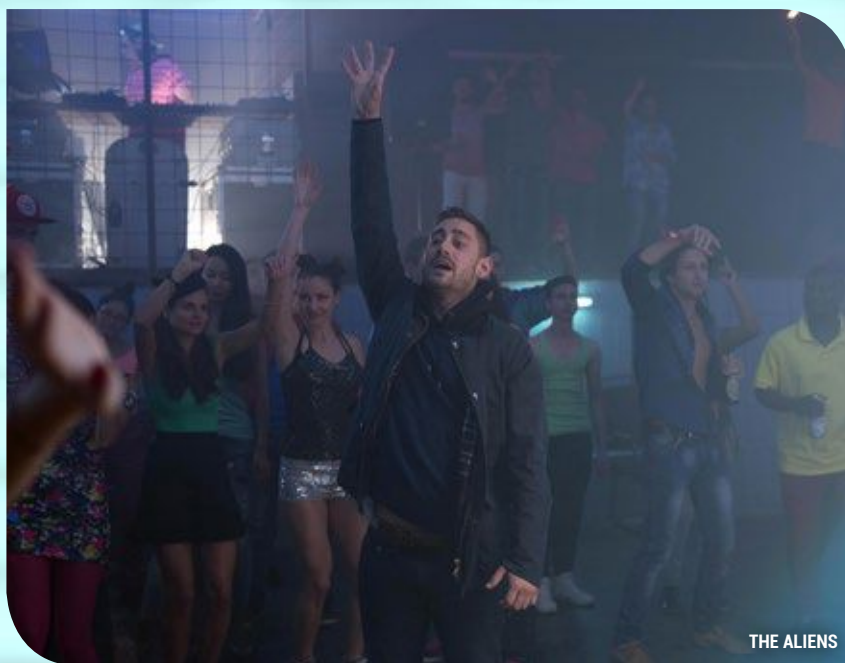
But what you probably want to know, if you haven't been following the series (and hopefully, by now you'll be clamouring to catch up), is whether Jake's mission is a success, if he manages to stop the assassination and, if so, what sort of

world does he create? Well, I ain't telling; but there are, I'm glad to say, wonderful twists and turns, terrific and unexpected plot developments and a final episode that is both downbeat and uplifting and, thankfully, wonderfully conclusive. **11.22.63** is a textbook example of how to tell a smart, snappy, succinct story that is, at times, not for the faint-hearted (it's free from US Network restrictions, so there's plenty of brutal violence and cussin') and not only plays with its time travel conceit but also touches all sorts of social bases (including domestic abuse and racial tension) as it fearlessly and honestly recreates a world that was, in the scheme of things, little more than yesterday but, in so many ways, seems like an entirely different world altogether. It's packed with smart, believable characters played to perfection by a sensational cast (apart from Franco they're all pretty much unknown, certainly to a UK audience) and brought to the screen with such incredible attention to detail it's hard to believe it's not actually been filmed back in the 1960s.

We're in a New Golden Age of Television, there's surely no doubt about that. The US Networks still tend to play it fairly safe but it's out on the fringes of broadcasting that we're now finding the real, ground-breaking, trailblazing gems. **11.22.63** is pure 24-carat gold television and, what the hell, I'm already calling it as my favourite TV show of the year. If you take the plunge and immerse yourself in this very special piece of TV, I rather think you will too...

THE ALIENS

Allow me to fly the flag, briefly, for a rare piece of UK fantasy TV that caught my attention a few weeks back. Sadly, it doesn't appear to have ignited many people's interests, which is a shame because E4's **The Aliens**, created and written by Fintan Ryan, who wrote several



THE ALIENS

episodes of the second series of BBC Three's **In The Flesh**, wasn't half bad once you'd accepted its griminess and grittiness and its very British dystopian sensibility.

Set forty years after an alien spacecraft has come down off the coast of the UK, we find the distinctly humanoid extraterrestrials housed in a crumbling, heavily fortified walled city known as Troy. The 'aliens', whose hair is an addictive drug when smoked, are allowed to integrate with humanity, but their movements are strictly controlled and monitored. Michael (**Being Human**) Socha plays Border Control guard Lewis Garvey, who discovers that he's half-human/half-alien thanks to a liaison between his father (Michael Smiley) and a female alien. This is unlikely to go down well with his superiors or, indeed, anyone on the 'human' side of the wall. Lewis finds himself drawn deeper and deeper into Troy's grubby world of drug dealing, gangsters and 'aliens' fighting to be regarded as equals in six visually interesting, if bleak episodes which are laced through with black humour (largely from **Horrible Histories**' Jim Howick as



THE WALKING DEAD

ALSO SCREENING



PREACHER

Dominic (Howard Stark) Cooper stars as small town preacher Jesse Custer who is possessed by a half-demon/half-angel entity called Genesis.

From May 23rd on AMC through BT.

POWERS

More superhuman stylings in this glossy new series, based on the popular comic book series, starring Sharlto Copley and Michelle Forbes as officers working for a police division investigating the criminal activities with a super-powered slant.

From late May on Spike TV

SECOND CHANCE

Struggling US drama featuring former EastEnders star Robert Kazinsky as a corrupt police chief brought back from the dead and struggling to make amends for his past misdemeanours.

From May 12th on Universal.

naive alien Dominic) and blunt, bloody violence. Some of its storytelling and moralising are a little unsubtle but Socha has developed into a promising leading man (even if he looks constantly on the edge of a nervous breakdown here) and Ryan has a good ear for smart dialogue and well-drawn characters. But something doesn't quite click and **The Aliens** is never quite sharp enough or as essential as it needs to be, perhaps because it reminds us of bigger budget movies such as **District 9**. But it's a brave effort, even though, with its cast of fairly unsympathetic and downright unlikeable characters, it was never destined to become a solid crossover genre hit like last year's **Humans**. The series ends on a please-recommission-us cliffhanger, but with viewing figures barely touching 250,000, I think we can conclude that this is one extra-terrestrial incursion that has been quite comfortably contained and repelled.

THE WALKING DEAD

AMC's zombie survival drama **The Walking Dead** has been rightly applauded as one of the strongest and most compelling dramas on television since its debut in 2008. It's a grim, dark, nihilistic show that demands a lot of its audience and takes no prisoners in taking them where it feels they need to be as it chronicles the ongoing post-apocalyptic struggle of Andrew Lincoln's Rick Grimes and his motley crew. Season Six, which finished last month, has seen the show playing fast and loose with its credibility, though. I'm sure I don't need to remind you of the farrago of the 'Glenn Dumpster Debacle', which pulled the rug out from under what had been a cracking first half of the season. Since the series returned for its back-half, it's been playing silly bugged games, constantly teasing viewers with coy cliffhangers which suggest that – gasp – a fan favourite character has just been killed off/is about to get killed off/is bound to be killed off next week. The producers have pulled the

same stunt several times this season; the penultimate episode suggested that moody Daryl (Norman Reedus) had been shot in the head, only for us to discover towards the end of the following episode that oh no, he's okay, phew! Season Six ended with an extraordinarily tense ten-minute sequence where Rick and co. are finally outmanoeuvred by the Saviours and their terrifying leader Negan (Jeffrey Dean Morgan), who plays cat and mouse with the group as he decides which of them he's going to kill as punishment for wiping out most of his people earlier in the season. Someone gets their head staved in, of course, but we don't see who it is, as its shot from the poor unfortunate's perspective. Fade to credits.

It's frustrating that **The Walking Dead** has had to resort to such cheapjack sensationalist stunts. In theory, we have to wait six months to find out who's carked it (although we'll obviously find out earlier because of this thing I stumbled across called The Internet) but it all smacks of a show that is starting to lose its confidence and is worried its audience is going to drift away – perhaps an understandable concern for a series approaching its seventh year. But this is an intelligent, well-observed show and it really doesn't need to stoop to the depths of such shallow headline-grabbing ploys to bring us back. The Glenn Dumpster Debacle has already fractured my faith in the series and this clumsy attempt to keep us on tenterhooks (other hooks are available) over the summer just reeks of a show that is starting to lose its edge and its commitment. I'll be back next year to see where we go next (especially as the Negan arc is one of the strongest from the comic series) but if I continue to feel as if my intelligence (such as it is) is being insulted by shock tactic storytelling, then **The Walking Dead** may well become... well, dead to me... +

Contact me via the magic of email at paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com or do the Twitter thing @PMount

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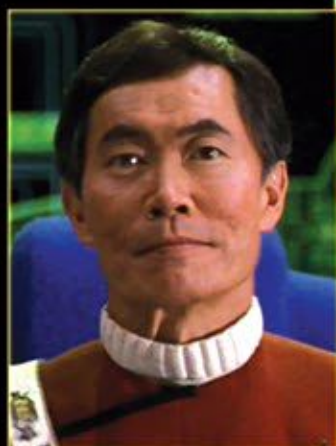
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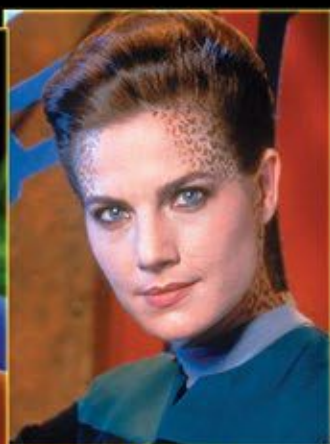
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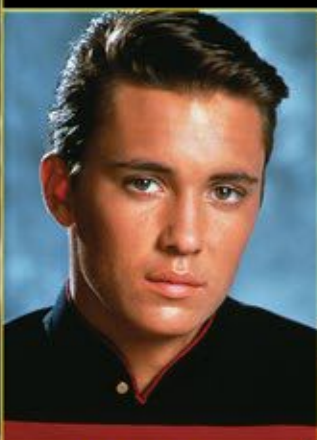


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